“Whose city? Our city!”

Layered landscape of gentrification in Brooklyn, New York

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

This is a study on resistance to gentrification in Brooklyn, New York. The premise of the study is to look at the 21st century city through an anthropological lens. From the 1980s on neoliberal capitalism has led to cities around the world to become playgrounds for the hyper-healthy where private property and profit rates trump people's right to their city. In this study gentrification is understood as a process where marginalized low-income communities of color are disproportionately threatened by displacement as new development and people appear in their neighborhoods. Thus, this study has used gentrification as a context for analyzing how urban inequalities are systematically produced on the one hand, and lived, negotiated and resisted in everyday life on the other. It examines the city as a multiplicity of layered lived realities charged with antagonisms between 'us' and 'them', and in constant renegotiation between conflict and compromise.

This thesis is a contribution to anthropology of, and in, the city. As over half of humanity now lives in towns and cities, this thesis speaks to the importance of urban anthropology in understanding the human condition. In order to assemble a more comprehensive picture, the thesis combines the concept of urban cosmopolitics and anthropological theories of landscape, art, and resistance with critical urban theory that has demanded cities for people, not for profit.

This thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in New York City between April and June 2017. The main research methods included participant observation in various events and settings, and semi-structured interviews with six activists and artists all in their own way engaged in resistance to gentrification. All of the participants had lived all or most of their lives in New York, and had personal experience with the pressures of being priced out of their neighborhoods. Supplementary information was gathered online from social media posts, blogs, websites and articles. Also, countless ethnographic encounters in and with the city have contributed to the analysis.

This thesis analyzes how gentrification changes the urban landscape wherein people dwell and have formed their sense of belonging, community and identity. The urban landscape is seen as consisting of physical, political, social, historical and cultural layers. It is suggested that resistance to gentrification in New York City is resistance to systemic racism inherent in urban development. Moreover, social movements across the city have drawn an analogy between gentrification and colonialism, which is also factored into the analysis. Thus, connecting it to historical urban policies and practices the study suggests that gentrification in New York City is not merely an inevitable part of life in the city but a result of urban planning; zoning and housing policy have protected the segregation of neighborhoods and enabled the displacement of low-income communities of color. These unequal power relations that shape the city without regard to its people have been central in identifying and analyzing why people are engaged in resistance. This thesis examines various kinds of acts of resistance that vary from individual to collective, from overt to covert, and from demonstrations to imagining and circulating alternative futures and narratives. Special attention is given to art as resistance: it is analyzed as empowering the community, creating spaces of dissent, and making visible different life-worlds within the city. Finally, the thesis analyzes how resistance involves people in the politics of the city; exclusion from decision-making, unsustainable urban development, and co-optation of culture are issues that particularly disenfranchised communities across the city are facing in their struggle to assert their right to their city.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
Anthropology, right to the city, urban cosmopolitics, gentrification, landscape, resistance, community art

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee gentrifikaation vastustamista Brooklynissa, New Yorkissa. Tutkielman lähtökohtana on tarkastella 2000-luvun kaupunkia antropologian näkökulmasta. 1980-luvulta alkaen neoliberaali kapitalismi on muuttanut monet suurkaupungit ympäri maailmaa superrikkaiden leikkikentiksi, joilla yksityisomaisuus ja liikevoitto on tärkeämpää kuin ihmisten oikeus kaupunkiin. Tässä tutkielmassa gentrifikaatio ymmärretään prosessina, jossa etenkin marginalisoituja pienituloisia yhteisöjä uhkaa pakko muuttaa, kun heidän asuinalueensa alkaa houkutella uutta rakentamista ja uusia ihmisiä. Näin ollen, gentrifikaatiota on käytetty kontekstina analysoidessa, kuinka urbaaneja eriarvoisuuksia yhtäältä systemaattisesti tuotetaan, ja toisaalta, miten niiden kanssa eletään, miten niistä neuvotellaan ja miten niitä vastustetaan jokapäiväisessä elämässä. Tutkielma tarkastelee kaupunkia monimuotoisena elettyjen todellisuuksien kerrostumana, joka on täynnä jännitteitä 'meidän' ja 'muiden' välillä, ja jossa ristiriidoista ja kompromisseista neuvotellaan jatkuvasti.

Tutkielma osallistuu antropologiseen keskusteluun kaupungeista sekä tutkimuskohteena että -ympäristönä. Koska jo yli puolet ihmiskunnasta asuu kaupungeissa, tutkielma haluaa kiinnittää huomiota kaupunkiantropologian merkitykseen ihmisyyden ymmärtämisessä. Kootakseen kattavamman kuvan tutkitusta aiheesta, tutkielma yhdistää urbaanin kosmopolitiikan käsitteen ja antropologiset teoriat maisemasta, taiteesta ja vastarinnasta kriittiseen kaupunkiteoriaan, joka on vaatinut kaupunkeja ihmisille, ei voitontavoittelulle.

Tutkielma pohjautuu etnografiseen kenttätyöhön, joka toteutettiin New Yorkissa huhtikuusta kesäkuuhun 2017. Tärkeimmät käytetyt tutkimusmenetelmät olivat osallistuva havainnointi erinäisissä tapahtumissa ja tilanteissa, sekä puolistrukturoidut haastattelut kuuden aktivistin ja taiteilijan kanssa, jotka kaikki osallistuivat osaltaan gentrifikaation vastustamiseen. Kaikki haastatellut olivat asuneet koko tai lähes koko elämänsä New Yorkissa, ja heillä oli henkilökohtaista kokemusta gentrifikaation mukanaan tuomista taloudellisista paineista muuttaa pois asuinalueiltaan. Lisäksi, tutkimusdataa on täydennetty tiedolla, jota on kerätty sosiaalisesta mediasta, blogeista, verkkosivustoilta ja internetartikkeleista. Myös lukemattomat etnografiset kohtaamiset kaupungissa ovat edistäneet analyysia.

Tutkielman analyysi osoittaa gentrifikaation muuttavan kaupunkimaisemaa, jossa ihmiset elävät, ja johon he yhdistävät kuulumisentunteita, yhteisöllisyyttä ja identiteettinsä. Tutkielmassa kaupunkimaiseman ymmärretään koostuvan fyysisistä, poliittisista, sosiaalista, historiallisista ja kulttuurisista kerroksista. Tutkielma osoittaa, että gentrifikaation vastustaminen New York Cityssä tarkoittaa systeemisen rasismin värittämän kaupunkikehittämisen vastustamista. Lisäksi, monet kaupungin aktivistiliikkeet vertaavat gentrifikaatiota kolonialismiin, mikä on keskeistä tutkielman analyysissa. Näin ollen, historiallisten menettelytapojen valossa tutkielma tuo esiin, kuinka gentrifikaatio ei ole vain väistämätön osa kaupungin elinkaarta, vaan kaupunkisuunnittelun tulosta; kaavoitus- ja asuntopolitiikka ovat suojelleet asuinalueiden segregoitumista ja edistäneet pienituloisten vähemmistöyhteisöjen pakkomuuttoja. Nämä kaupunkia muovaavat eriarvoiset valtasuhteet ovat olleet keskeisessä asemassa analyysissa vastarinnasta. Tutkielma tunnistaa monenlaisia vastarinnan muotoja , jotka vaihtelevat yksityisistä kollektiivisiin, avoimista piilotettuihin, ja mielenosoituksista vaihtoehtoisten narratiivien ja tulevaisuuksien kuvittelemiseen ja jakamiseen. Tutkielmassa osoitetaan taiteella olevan erityinen rooli vastarinnassa: se voimaannuttaa yhteisöä, luo tiloja erimielisyyksien esiintuomiselle, ja tekee näkyväksi kaupungissa sijaitsevat erilliset maailmat. Lopulta, tutkielma tuo esiin, miten vastarinta liittää ihmiset osaksi kaupungin politiikkaa; ulkopuolelle jättäminen päätöksenteossa, kestämätön kaupunkikehitys, ja kulttuurin omiminen ovat asioita, joita vastaan etenkin huonommassa asemassa olevat yhteisöt kamppailevat puolustaessaan oikeuttaan kaupunkiinsa.

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Antropologia, oikeus kaupunkiin, urbaani kosmopolitiikka, gentrifikaatio, maisema, vastarinta, yhteisötaide

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Table of contents

1 Introduction

In the past decade the world has seen a remarkable amount of events where established orders of things have become contested on various fronts of inequality. Bubbles are burst on, among other things, income and wealth inequality, sexual harassment, and systemic racism as formerly silenced people and disenfranchised groups are truly finding their voice and realizing their power. Long-standing hegemonies of capitalism, patriarchy and 'whiteness' are becoming increasingly hard to justify. But fighting for justice and equality is not, of course, a new phenomenon. However, what sets this historical period apart from previous ones is the enormous and immediate reach of social media. For example, staying 'woke', a byword of social awareness first associated with the Black Lives Matter movement, became a widely used (and later abused) part of popular discourse and vocabulary after 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. Suddenly everyone was proclaiming to #staywoke online. Consequently, learning about and being aware of what is happening around us, and getting involved has perhaps never been easier. Accordingly, inaction and complicity have also become difficult to justify. This has been fertile ground for various resistance movements to gain new momentum. The Occupy movements or the Arab Spring, for instance, are famous examples of how people got organized in large numbers on social media to make a worldwide impact. The scale and reach of these events were unpresedented (Juris 2012).

Moreover, issues of inclusion and exclusion, of being represented and brushed aside, of being heard and silenced are brought into popular and political discourse. In the context of cities and urban life these issues are manifested in a concrete and comprehensive way in the process of gentrification. As cities are running out of space, the benefits of the powerful continuously trump in importance the costs that the powerless have to pay. That is, in neoliberal cities the financial benefits of the few are prioritized over the basic needs, such as healthcare, education and housing, of the vast majority of city residents (e.g. Angotti & Morse 2017; Brash 2010; Brenner et al. 2012; Harvey 2009; Low 2018; Mayer 2009).

Gentrification has become a global phenomenon that takes place in most cities on every continent in varying forms, and New York City has certainly not escaped its reach (e.g. Lees et al. 2018; Smith 1996, 2006). Some claim that gentrification is only a natural part of the life of a city; cities change, thus gentrification is inevitable. This view, however, is in stark contrast to the lived experiences of the people facing and resisting it. They claim that gentrification, at least in New York, is a result of policy, which makes it neither natural nor inevitable, but intentional (see also Angotti & Morse 2017). Gentrification and the many changes it brings to the neighborhoods displace low-income and working-class people who cannot afford the rising rents. This raises a political question of who has the right to the city, or who is the city for.

Therefore, anthropologically speaking resistance to gentrification is an interesting topic because looking into social movements engaged in the fight for their city reveals antagonisms between different social groups within the city, namely the long-term residents and the newcomers, and uncovers how power relations are played out within wider society. Their activism sheds light on and critiques the ways in which cities are governed and developed, and how unequally different socioeconomic, and, in the specific context of New York City, racial and ethnic groups are treated. These social movements perceive gentrification as a paradoxical process where the disenfranchised communities are simultaneously both exploited and brushed aside.

1.1 Research questions and perspective

In this thesis I discuss how gentrification affects the lived realities of low-income communities in parts of Brooklyn, New York, and analyze some of the tools people have employed to resist it. The acts of resistance to gentrification reveal a lot about people's relationship to the city, to their neighborhoods, and to each other. Resistance also sheds light on politics of exclusion, unsustainable urban development, and co-optation of culture that have changed the urban landscape. To a certain extent, then, this thesis aligns with "dark anthropology" (Ortner 2016) that focuses on the harsh dimensions of social life under neoliberalism such as power, domination and oppression.

I originally became interested in gentrification after coming across a series of articles on the internet forum Hyperallergic about 'art-washing', a term that was recently used

among anti-gentrification protesters in Boyle Heights, Los Angles where new art galleries had emerged in a low-income community of color (Stromberg 2016a). These galleries were accused of taking advantage of the affordable spaces in the neighborhood without any regard to the community they were infiltrating in the process. This unease resulted in a series of heated protests, and eventually some of the first galleries were forced to shut down (Stromberg 2016b). After some research I discovered that a similar situation has been unfolding in different areas in New York City for decades. In short, artists have helped make neighborhoods such as Soho, the Lower East Side, Williamsburg, and most recently Bushwick, appealing to new demographics and outside investment, which has transformed these neighborhoods into something else completely (Zukin & Braslow 2011).

Today, real estate industry drives gentrification in New York City, and the city and state officials enable the process (Angotti & Morse 2017). This originates from post-WWII politics of rebuilding the nation, and is a consequence of neoliberal project of privatization and deregulation since 1980s. On a concrete level, gentrification in New York is largely about housing availability. The process also profoundly involves commodification of culture, art, public space and communities, which is why the right to the city discourse, initiated by Henri Lefebvre (1968) over fifty years ago and reviewed over and over again (e.g. Harvey 2012; Mayer 2009, 2017), has also been adopted by social movements across the city.

Social movements have a rich and long history in New York City. Perhaps most famous example of resistance around the issues of urban development has been the work of Jane Jacobs (1961), an author and activist who fought against Robert Moses' 'urban renewal' and 'slum clearance' projects already in the 1950s and 60s. Although she has later been criticized of being a gentrifier and for overly romanticizing the authenticity of urban spaces, the impact of her visionary work in urban planning still holds significance. Her legacy of demanding bottom-up planning is especially noteworthy in ongoing community plan efforts across the city (e.g. Susser 2012; Zukin 2010). Besides Jacobs, many other social movements have made remarkable efforts in demanding fair housing. For example, again in the spirit of urban renewal in the 1970s the city evicted poor people and closed up residential buildings on the Upper West Side on Manhattan

speculating that new development would lead to profit. However, the residents, mainly families of color, organized Operation Move-In, a squatter movement that took over the buildings and installed hundreds of families in the vacant apartments where some were eventually able to stay put (Metropolitan Council on Housing). Similar stories across the city are numerous.

In other words, gentrification is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it has been recognized academically for over fifty years after being coined by British urban sociologist Ruth Glass (1964, xviii):

> One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes – upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages – two rooms up and two down – have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. (…) Once this process of "gentrification" starts in a district, it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced, and the whole social character of the district is changed.

Yet, in anthropology until the mid-1990s the city was undertheorized and the anthropological voice rarely heard in the urban studies discourse (Low 1996). Especially urban research in western industrial societies was for a long time excluded from the mainstream disciplinary agenda. Consequently, even when "historical events in the aftermath of the Second World War and the process of decolonization forced anthropologists to turn their attention to Western society, they were famously encouraged to carry out research in rural villages, not in cities" (Prato & Pardo 2013: 84–85). Thus, until quite recently, gentrification and its ramifications have not been a very popular research topic either.

In the past couple of years, however, a new generation of engaged urban anthropologists has emerged focusing research on "the ways in which it is increasingly hard for people to navigate the city due to economic restructuring and public policies that place the burden of survival on the individual" (Low 2018, 1; see also Brash 2018; Checker 2018). This has also been the premise for this thesis; the process of gentrification offers a fruitful context for trying to grasp how urban inequalities are systematically produced on the one hand, and lived, negotiated and resisted in everyday life on the other. Furthermore, there seems to be a disconnection between the definition of gentrification and its real-

life meaning within the communities it affects.

The term gentrification is ambiguous and problematic because it has been used so differently over time. And it is jargon, and not quite sufficient enough anymore to describe the scale of transformations cities are going through today. But in my experience calling it something else is not common in ordinary everyday discussions either. So, for a lack of a better word, I use gentrification in the same way it was used among the people I met during my fieldwork in New York. Also, it is important to acknowledge that not all people know the word gentrification or what it means, but they do notice their neighborhoods changing and communities disappearing. And not all people have the time or resources to fight it either. This is why resistance to gentrification is a community effort.

In discussions with people, community was talked about a lot but not defined, and hence not constrained to any specific definition; depending on the context it can refer to people of color, a certain neighborhood, women, a network of organizations, or indeed everyone living in the borough or the entire city. In a sense these dispersed communities are imagined constructs (see Anderson 1983), but nevertheless very meaningful in people's minds. And belonging to a certain community is closely linked to notions of authenticity. For example, when people talked about gentrification in their own neighborhoods, the changes were almost always juxtaposed to their nostalgic memories of how things used to be (see Zukin 2010).

Amongst its social impacts, gentrification quite literally erases distinctiveness, culture and communities, all crucial layers in the landscape of the city. Walking the streets of New York City one can hardly miss the constant presence of green plywood walls surrounding buildings and plots, or even entire city blocks, under construction turning them into luxury apartments or gleaming office towers. Of course, not all construction is about gentrification. But new luxury construction in marginalized communities such as Bushwick, Chinatown, or East New York undeniably is part of the gentrification process. People tend to get upset about change only after it personally affects them or material change in their environment alerts them "to fragility and brokenness, provoking feelings of loss and frustration" (Berglund 2019a: 229). Thus, gentrification is easily brushed aside in popular discourse outside the disenfranchised communities. For the

communities, however, gentrification does represent losses on many fronts.

In addition to the 'post no bills' signs around construction sites, another inescapable presence in the urban landscape of New York City is street art. The somewhat indisputable aesthetic value of beautiful murals aside, public art has deep social and political undertones that are closely linked to gentrification (see Deutsche 1988; Deutsche & Gendel Ryan 1984). Art is problematic and powerful, a dynamic I will look closely into in the analysis part of this thesis.

I learned along the way that one of the most revealing aspects of talking about gentrification is actually the language that is used to talk about it. Words such as resistance, solidarity, resilience, oppression, colonialism, and predatory practices reoccurred in discussions all the time. Also the avoidance of stereotypes and making generalizations was widely common among people engaged in resistance; people made a point to specify their origins, be it a country from where their families originated, race and/or ethnicity, or a neighborhood where they and their families live and with which they identify. This went in to show how people form meaningful attachments between their neighborhoods, communities and identities. It also points out to the importance of acknowledging how different landscapes people dwell in within the city.

In regard to politics and unequal power relations, especially noteworthy in the language about gentrification is how it is paralleled to oppression and colonialism. Moreover, during my research it became increasingly obvious that whenever American society and politics are at stake, race cannot be left out of the analysis, and it was made explicitly clear to me that gentrification too is very much a racial issue. I found myself wondering how it is possible that decade after decade racial issues continue to be at the forefront of almost all questions around inequality in America, and yet nothing seems to change for good. I later learned that the answer lies in the foundations of the country.

In short, regardless of Barack Obama's presidency that seemed to usher the United States into a post-racial society, race still continues to be (re)produced through colonial institutions and power relations (Rosa & Bonilla 2017). Furthermore, Barnor Hesse has proposed that race should be understood as "colonial constituted practices" (Hesse 2016: viii):

> Race is not in the eye of the beholder or on the body of the objectified. Race is an inherited western, modern-colonial practice of violence, assemblage, superordination, exploitation, and segregation. Race is constitutively and unequally relational, regulatory, and governmental, demarcating the colonial rule of Europe over non-Europe. Race has diverse, irrepressible, circuitous, fractured, antagonistic, material and discursive histories. Race underlines and colors the western political institution of nation-societies. Race is the political relation of antagonism between institutionally dominant white populations and dominated non-white populations. Race is the social policing of non-whiteness, particularly Blackness, under the authoritarian populism of whiteness.

Accordingly, in order to understand the current political moment in the United States, Jonathan Rosa and Yarimar Bonilla (2017) urge anthropologists to consider the country as a settler state. In this light present-day racism is also linked to colonial histories of power. In other words, Rosa and Bonilla assert that the nation-state project of the United States is grounded on coloniality, and the country's democratic institutions are "fundamentally rooted in and reproductive of racial democracy and racial capitalism" (Rosa & Bonilla 2017: 204). Therefore, systemic racism is manifested also in urban planning policies that have led to segregated neighborhoods and racist practices such as 'redlining' in New York City (see Angotti & Morse 2017). As a result especially black and brown communities have become disenfranchised, marginalized, and then easily displaced as cities and the market forces have claimed space for growth.

Thus, resistance to gentrification in New York City is resistance to systemic racism inherent in urban development. This implies that from the perspective of the disenfranchised communities urban development is flawed and needs revaluating. In a way then, resistance could be seen "as a form of repair" (Berglund 2019a: 229) through creating alternative narratives. Thus, resistance is dwelling in the political landscape (Lounela et al. 2019); for people engaged in a fight for their right to the city, resistance to gentrification is a political struggle for "a liveable world on the other side of their experiences" (Robbins 2013: 459) of neglect and oppression. And what keeps them going is their hope "that they can successfully create a good beyond what is presently given in their lives" (ibid. 458).

Due to the socioeconomic and racial disparities, and centralized planning policies that

conform to the needs of 'the market', the city contains innumerable different lived realities. In other words, the city consists of multiple, overlapping and competing assemblages (Blok & Farías 2016). Furthermore, because of the antagonisms between these different constructions of the city, a common urban world is virtually unattainable. Thus, the concept of cosmopolitics offers a way to analyze the conflicts and compromises that unfold between the different life-worlds (Stengers 2005).

I realize that a discussion about resistance to gentrification is in danger of reaching quite expected conclusions. Sure, people resist gentrification because it drives up living expenses and dislocates people out of their homes and neighborhoods, but this is only part of the big picture. In reality gentrification poses a threat to the community that is associated with safety, camaraderie, sense of belonging, and solidarity. Through analyzing acts of resistance and the role of art and artists in this equation, I suggest that resistance is as much, if not more, about building and empowering the community and realizing their power to fight back, as it is about the immediate or tangible results of activism.

In short, this thesis aims to draw a picture of *what resistance to gentrification means in the everyday lives of communities engaged in a battle for their city, their neighborhoods, their homes, and their communities and culture*.

In the next subchapters to this introduction I will go through the research methods I used to conduct my research. Then, I will give an overview of some self-reflections and ethical considerations that occurred during the process.

In chapter two I present the main concepts and theories used in this thesis. I have used the concept of urban cosmopolitics by Anders Blok and Ignacio Farías (2016) to analyze the city and its multiplicities. It combines Bruno Latour's (2005) actor-network theory (ANT) – and assemblage thinking that has grown out of that – with Isabelle Stengers' (2005) concept of cosmopolitics. Anthropological theories of landscape are used in further explaining the city as layered lived realities (Berglund 2019b; Ingold 2000). Art is a central theme in this thesis and its analysis is built on the assumption that it has agency (see Gell 1998; Latour 2005). Accordingly, art is analyzed as creating 'spaces of dissent' (Marrero-Guillamón 2016), which links it tightly to resistance. Lastly, I have analyzed resistance using some classic anthropological theories (Ortner 1995,

2016; Scott 1985), and in relation to political antagonisms (Mouffe 2013).

In chapter three I outline the context of this thesis by describing the gentrification specific to New York City, and trace how policies and the structural conditions of the city affect people's lives. I will also describe some of my encounters with people and places in order to further contextualize my arguments. Finally, in the remaining chapters 4–6 I analyze how gentrification changes the urban landscape and how this is experienced; how people have employed art as an act of resistance; and how gentrification resistance involves people in the politics of the city.

1.2 Methods and data

This thesis is in large part based on eleven weeks of fieldwork carried out in New York City between April and June 2017, mainly in Williamsburg and Bushwick in Brooklyn. I had visited New York a few times before, most recently only about five months prior to this fieldwork period. Coincidentally that visit took place at the same time as an event named *Artists: NYC is Not for Sale* was held at Artists Space in Soho. The video recording of this event (I unfortunately was unable to attend it myself) became one of my most important initial sources of information, and is included in the analysis in this thesis.

On my previous visits I was always more focused, as one does, on being a tourist and hence spent most of my time mainly on Manhattan. This time I got settled on the other side of the East River in Williamsburg, a neighborhood that has already been heavily gentrified and is today well-known around the world as a concentration of bearded hipsters and artisanal coffee shops. Partly by a lucky coincidence I ended up living in a live/work loft space with a group of artists who were no strangers to the pressures of increasing interest toward prime real-estate locations such as theirs. In fact, at the time of my stay they were one of the only remaining original live/work spaces that had settled in the area in the 1990s, and they were currently struggling to keep their home of 21 years.

My lodging was located on Grand Street in Brooklyn, right next to Grand Ferry Park, a former port for ferries that used to transport people to and from Manhattan before the Williamsburg Bridge, that now connects Williamsburg to Lower East Side of Manhat-

tan, was completed in 1903. By the East River right next to the park used to stand the Domino Sugar Refinery that employed hundreds of people from Bedford-Stuyvesant, Clinton Hill, Williamsburg and other neighboring communities. In line with recent rezonings to Williamsburg's riverside that was formerly mainly in industrial use (see Angotti & Morse 2017; Susser 2012), most of the factory has now been demolished and the site is in the process of being redeveloped into a massive luxurious housing complex with a new riverside park.

The geographical focus of my research is based in two neighborhoods that are connected though a similar historical trajectory in regards to gentrification, Williamsburg and Bushwick. In spite of the influx of the creative class and other newcomers in the last couple of decades, there still exists a community of low-income, mainly Puerto Rican people that call Los Sures, the Southside of Williamsburg, their home. Like Williamsburg before, Bushwick is still a mainly working-class neighborhood but this is now rapidly changing too. In fact, Bushwick has now been referred to as the new Williamsburg, or 'East Williamsburg', because of the transformations currently taking place there. The artists, that first could no longer afford rents in Manhattan and migrated to Williamsburg, are now priced out of there too and started moving further east to Bushwick to occupy inexpensive industrial buildings. However, gentrification is happening along the same lines in low-income neighborhoods across all of New York City, so some examples in my analyses are borrowed from other neighborhoods too.

Having chosen New York City as the site of my research, I knew I would encounter certain inevitable restrictions regarding my fieldwork period, most significant of which was money and consequently time. Had I had more generous funding would my research probably benefitted from a longer period in the field. Also, networking in a city as big and hectic as New York proved to be very difficult. Because of these constrains, I also ventured into the world of online ethnography by including social media posts and discussions, videos and certain websites as sources for my research data. It proved to be a well-grounded choice after I realized that a lot of activism and organizing actually happens through online platforms, making them an abundant source of information. This is noteworthy because "the increased use and availability of these [mobile] technologies has provided marginalized and racialized populations with new tools for

documenting incidents of state-sanctioned violence and contesting media representations of racialized bodies and marginalized communities" (Bonilla & Rosa 2015:5). Including data from online platforms has also allowed me to be more reflexive with my findings, as I was no longer stuck with only the certain amount of data I was able to collect from the physical field in the limited amount of time I had. Consequently, my fieldwork was rather multi-sited (Marcus 1995).

In regard to the traditional ethnographic research methods, my data relies much more heavily on participant observation in various situations and events than on interviews. Also, my interviews are not as consistent as I had initially hoped. Thus, as stated above, I also gathered a significant amount of information from websites, online newspapers, forums, blogs and social media platforms to build a more coherent understanding of things.

While I was planning for my fieldwork I reached out to a number of people and organizations that are actively involved in anti-gentrification activism in the hopes of gaining contacts and perhaps gathering participants to my research. However, many of my initial emails were never answered. The few answers I got advised about upcoming events I would be welcome to attend but implied no direct contacts or possibilities with future collaboration. So I decided I would have to find my contacts only after entering the field, and go to these events to get started. Luckily my hosts turned out to be very helpful as well.

So, a big part of my participant observation entailed attending various kinds of events dealing with gentrification, art and resistance. These events consist of three panel discussions on art and gentrification, a community theater performance followed by a discussion with the audience, a festival of resistance, a general meeting of an activist network, an open local government board meeting, a walking tour, a rally, two small protests, and two block parties to name the most important ones. I also attended an informal weekly occurring neighborhood gathering where the community came together to cook and enjoy dinner together. In these events I interacted with a lot of people and heard many stories, which profoundly contributed to my data.

Even though I thought I had quite a clear idea about positioning myself as a participant

observer, entering the field I realized that I was not the one who would dictate my standing in different situations. The defining characteristics of doing ethnography, immersion and distance, and their "pervasive presence of a compelling canon restricting the way anthropologists should conduct themselves in the field" (Estalella & Criado 2018: 3) proved difficult to implement in practice.

Thus, in full disclosure, returning from the field my initial feeling was that the whole thing had been a failure. Somehow I knew I had gained a lot of insight on resistance to gentrification but felt my data was too inconsistent and scattered from bits and pieces here and there. For quite a while I struggled to make any sense of my research until I realized that my short fieldwork period had not exactly followed the more conventional ethnographic practice guidelines that we are still taught at university. Especially my position as an observer was difficult to wrap my head around, as it turned out to be not quite what I had expected.

However, it was not until after returning from the field and getting into reading more anthropological writings on current urban issues and research practices that I realized "that the assumed norms and forms of ethnography" (Estalella & Criado 2018: 1) have recently been increasingly challenged. After being immersed in people's struggles with gentrification, I found myself having been more engaged than barely participating in order to write. So, I align my position in the field to the idea of engaged anthropology that calls for anthropological practice to engage with real-world problems and highlights commitment to social justice and transformation through politically informed action (Low 2018). After realizing that fieldwork is not quite what it used to be, I tried to embrace the idea of "incompleteness as a norm" (Marcus 2009: 28).

Furthermore, in the past decade or so, there has been a rising trend of anthropologists documenting creative adaptations to neoliberalism and resistance movements against it, and accordingly a re-emergence of resistance studies in anthropology as well (Ortner 2016). There have been two main ways that recent anthropological research has approached resistance: activist research involves personal engagement in the political under study, and cultural critique professes political solidarity with the cause under study without direct involvement in the political struggle in question (Ortner 2016). For my part however, my research did not involve personal engagement or deep participa-

tion in the political struggle under study (see Juris 2008). Thus, I was more a "sympathetic observer" (Berglund 2019b: 197), and this thesis is an effort of social and cultural critique.

In total I managed to do six interviews, all 40–80 minutes in length. The style of the interviews ranges from quite informal conversations to a couple of deeper, more structured ones. Three of the people I interviewed are community organizers and activists very actively involved in gentrification resistance in different parts of Brooklyn. Two are artists working with community organizations that create community murals and other kinds of art in low-income neighborhoods. Finally, I had a conversation with one of my hosts, also an artist, about the importance of art in society. All, but one, of my interviewees were non-white, and they all had lived in New York all or most of their lives. Perhaps needles to say, all of them also had quite similar political views, most leaning quite openly to the left. And all expressed distrust and critique towards the local and national governments. The interviews did not a follow a strictly set template, although there was a list of themes I brought into the discussions.

Finally, I use the works of two art projects in my analysis to emphasize the role art can have in resistance to gentrification; it enforces and makes visible the social connections within communities, empowers people, and makes different realities existing in the city visible too. In one of the projects small hand-made light signs suspended on doors and windows highlight the threat that gentrification poses to low-income communities. The other project has painted murals in Williamsburg that represent the communities in the area and depict how the neighborhood has changed.

1.3 Self reflection and ethical considerations

During the process of this thesis I have encountered difficulties I did not anticipate. Although I knew that gaining access is one of the most common obstacles anthropologists usually face and have to deal with somehow, I did not think it would be as hard as it proved to be. A big part of this had to do with the combination of my position as an outsider to New York, me being white, and time. In retrospect, I would have benefitted from making more contacts before leaving to the field; whereas now I rather naively thought I would find people along the way. The people I did find are from diverse back-

grounds, some I lived with, some I met a couple of times, and some I only talked to through email and social media. Although diversity is a resource, I feel that I did not form very deep relationships, which is reflected in the depth of my data and analysis. Also, I acknowledge that if I had interacted with different people and organizations, my findings would probably be very different as well, as they only reflect the views of the people I encountered, and thus the results presented in this thesis remain tentative at best.

As I was researching the backgrounds of gentrification in New York, it became clear that choosing where to locate myself even for my short stay was in itself quite problematic. I knew I wanted to be in Brooklyn but after reading about how, for example, even the presence of white bodies in neighborhoods can be seen as a gentrifying force (see Rosado 2015), I felt that an already heavily gentrified Williamsburg would be a safe choice. However, I felt bad about having to make a decision that felt like the easy way out, I feared that it would distance me even more from the things about which I wanted to learn.

I recognize that these kinds of thoughts occurred a lot during my fieldwork in different situations too; I felt uncomfortable being at times one of only few white people at events and other situation, and having to constantly justify why I was there. I found myself doubting who am I to research such topics, or put people's lives and the struggles they are dealing with as a topic of research. I also found that in reaching out to my contacts I had to be very explicit about my intentions and found it hard to explain why I was interested in hearing their stories and what I was going to do with them. Indeed, it was a difficult realization that the history of anthropology as writing about 'others' that still keeps "reproducing the same long-standing tropes and racialized hierarchies that have characterized the discipline since its origins" (Rosa & Bonilla 2017: 205), and the privileged assumption that anthropologists can study anyone and write their stories underlined my research too.

Thus, much of my discomfort arose from the fear of being perceived as just another entitled and privileged white person – which I of course am – and thus people would not want to talk to me. And some actually did not. After all, in many ways I did occupy the space of a gentrifier (see Schlichtman & Patch 2014). I also encountered a lot of frustra-

tion especially among community organizers about how they are continually asked to explain why gentrification is bad, what it means to the communities, and how to get involved. “Google it”, or “Have you watched our videos?” was a response I got a couple of times.

Interacting with people who are facing and fighting inequalities and oppression, I found it at times difficult to maintain at least some level of objectivity required for credible academic analysis. Partly because of this, I realize that the tone of my thesis might be taken as too liberal and leftist by anyone with more conservative political ideals. However, my descriptions and analyses only reflect the people with whom I communicated during my research, and it is their point of view I aim to portray.

Throughout the process of working on this thesis I have been guided by the code of ethics set by the American Anthropological Association. During my research, in discussions and other situations I made a point of being open and honest about who I was and what I was doing. In all interpersonal communication I always made sure to obtain informed consent. However, much of my observations are from events and situations that were open to the public and involved lots of people. In these instances it would not have been appropriate or even possible to ask for consent from, or even introduce myself to, everyone. Thus, in any descriptions of events and other situations I have refrained from describing or identifying people I did not directly interact with.

Anonymity of the participants of my research presented a big challenge because most of them are involved in gentrification resistance very publicly on many platforms, but some are private individuals who wished not to be identifiable. Also, some of the participants were willing to share information but did not want to be quoted or described in my analysis. So, in the name of consistency I have used very few direct quotes from anyone and in most quotes I do make I have not specified the person behind them. Also, I have used pseudonyms for any individuals I have specified, and refrained from affiliating anyone directly to any organizations or events from where they could be recognized. However, I use the real names of some of the organizations and projects because they could easily be recognized from their descriptions made in the analysis.

Looking back, choosing New York as the site of my research was definitely guided by

the nearly mythological image the city holds in the imagination of so many people worldwide. Also, New York was admittedly quite an obvious choice in regards to studying gentrification. However, as the purpose of this thesis has been gaining an understanding of gentrification and its ramifications, I feel my choice was well grounded and legitimate.

2 Theoretical framework

In this thesis I approach current urban issues and social movements in New York City in the context of gentrification. Applying the idea of urban cosmopolitics and anthropological theories of landscape, art and resistance to analyzing this often-obscured concept uncovers layers far beyond its neighborhood transforming capacities.

The theoretical starting point for this thesis was to look at the 21st century global city through the anthropological lens. Whereas cities once held a promise of abundant opportunities and a better life, today it is a completely different story (see Prato & Pardo 2013). In other words, cities have become increasingly divided as the super-rich and corporations have taken over the urban landscape. Shaped through the mechanisms and processes of "globalization, environmental disparities, socioeconomic inequality, governmental and corporate corruption and neoliberal urbanism", anthropologist Setha Low (2018, 2) calls it "the 'precarious city' of the present, where a substantial portion of urban residents are impoverished by structural systems of oppression and racism that benefit a small professional and elite class".

As a editor to a recent volume of theorizing anthropology and the city Low (2018) distinguishes eight critically important issues that characterize contemporary and future cities that are especially of public interest: precarity; displacement and mobility; security and insecurity; environment and sustainability; citizenship, rights and social justice; built environment and spatial governance; financialization and privatization; and heritage preservation and cultural expression. In this thesis I argue that all of these issues are played out in the process of gentrification in one way or another.

As David Harvey (2009 [1976]: 314) wrote over forty years ago, cities "are founded on the exploitation of the many by the few", which makes challenging the status quo a laborious task. Today, "urban policy-making hinges no longer primarily on the institutions of the elected state and its bureaucrats, but ever more on business, real estate and developer interests", while "the point of urban policy has become to facilitate the unfettered operation of 'the market'", and "[u]rban services (what is left of them) have become increasingly privatized, and city governments the purchasers rather than providers of services" (Mayer 2017, 6).

Accordingly, the theoretical framework of this thesis draws also upon critical urban theory that has sought to "underscore the urgent political priority of constructing cities that correspond to human social needs rather than to the capitalist imperative of profit-making and spatial enclosure" (Brenner et al. 2012, 2), in other words, demand cities for people, not for profit. This challenges the neoliberal urban development and the consequent commodification of urban public space, housing, health care, and culture among many other social necessities, a tradition that also urban social movements have rallied to become realized as unsustainable and even destructive. Critical urban theory then contributes to a revolution towards "alternative, radically democratic, socially just, and sustainable forms of urbanism" (ibid. 2).

Indeed, even though cities are facing accelerating social, political, economic and environmental crises and inequalities, underneath all that persists a glimmer of hope that takes form in city dwellers' creativity, imagination and resistance. Much of critical urban theory is based on Henri Lefebvre's (1968) classic concept of the 'right to the city' that has also been adopted as a political slogan by urban social movements worldwide.

However, this is not to say that there is a unified battle for more just cities. As Margit Mayer (2017: 10) has pointed out,

> [the] expansion of the urban disenfranchised has provided the basis for campaigns bringing together more different types of discontented and dispossessed groups than previously possible. But in spite of the similar experiences of dispossession, shared anger over predatory banks and corporate landlords, and widespread frustration with unresponsive local authorities, differences continue to exist and often hamper the emergence of unified strong movements.

This is reflected also in the somewhat fragmentary fights against gentrification in New York City. There are countless NGOs, tenants' and block associations, and community organizations that have their own specific premises and objectives. Although there have been some calls for a more united front, and some organizations have created larger networks, activism across the city today remains hierarchical and there are some surprisingly harsh in-group out-group distinctions between the different actors. Thus, politics are present on many levels in regard to gentrification and resistance.

2.1 Urban cosmopolitics

Analyzing the landscape of gentrification, the role of art in that context, and the various acts of resistance to gentrification imply that a certain kind political struggle is unfolding in urban lived realities. Thus, the politics of space, knowledge production and identity in the urban context need some attention. I have chosen to look at this through assemblage thinking that has been built upon Bruno Latour's (2005) actor-network theory (ANT), as well as Isabelle Stengers' (2005) concept of cosmopolitics. These concepts allow looking at the city as a multiplicity of layered life-worlds that are continually conflicted and compromised.

In the introduction to a volume on urban cosmopolitics they have edited, Anders Blok and Ignacio Farías (2016: 2) illustrate how actor-network theory has recently become embraced in rethinking the urban, as it enables looking at the city as "a multiplicity of changing, co-existing and mutually interfering urban assemblages". This rising trend in urban theory has emerged as critique and alternative to "political economy-centric readings of urbanization that reduce the urban to the workings of underlying political-economic structures" (ibid. 1). The view calls for a situated study of urban life, an approach that makes it especially compatible with anthropological inquiry.

In short, assemblage urbanism is about reimagining the city as a multiple object-space "brought into being via concrete relations, materials, knowledges and engagements" (ibid. 2), not as a bounded object. However, this should not be considered only epistemologically as various actors having different understanding of a city, but ontologically too. Put simply: "any city exists in multiple, overlapping ways" (ibid. 2). If a city is thus considered as a multiplicity of assemblages, this implies a political challenge that is shaped by "situations of radical co-presence" in which "conflictual politics of actual urban things" (ibid. 5) unfold. Politics in this light is an integral part of the urban assemblage.

Within the politics of urban assemblages, ontological politics deal with "the conditions of possibility in which we live" (Blok & Farías 2016: 7). In other words, ontologies should be understood as multiple and made into being through socio-material and techno-scientific practices. Thus, realities are made and remade in practice too,

consequently making the construction and enactment of realities political processes. This point is especially significant in regards to gentrification, because it "becomes apparent when comparing the versions of the city produced by city governments or real-estate markets" (ibid. 7) to that of its people. For example, in New York the city and the real estate industry have rebranded whole neighborhoods in order to attract a wealthier population, a process where the long-term residents and communities have been ignored. The ontological politics of urban assemblages, then, is about "looking into what is included and what is excluded from different enactments of the city, which entities and relationships are made present, and which are made absent" (ibid. 7). The key political question here is "*how* shared urban realities are made and remade in various contested practices" (ibid. 7; original emphasis).

'Cosmopolitics', a term adopted from Isabelle Stengers (2005), here refers to the search for and composition of common urban worlds that are riddled with conflicts and compromises, and "always in the process of being subtly transformed, destabilized, decentered, questioned, criticized or even destroyed" (Blok & Farías 2016: 2). Furthermore, cosmopolitics is "antithetical to any idea of consensus politics" rejecting the Kantian idea that "politics would ultimately be a means to achieve a transcendental state, a perpetual peace, or just an overarching consensus" (ibid. 9). Following a Latourian idea, this means that people do not really differ in opinion but inhabit completely different worlds. In other words, because, "(cosmo-)politics are not about language or interpretations, but about full-blown realities" (ibid. 9), adversaries do not actually come to agree on opinions, but start inhabiting another world.

Every urban site is haunted by these multiplicities; "urban sites are not bounded or simply local but rather produced in larger networks, stories and trajectories" (ibid. 11). In cities, then, the challenge of cosmopolitics is precisely the co-presence of multiple assemblages. Blok and Farías explain this by borrowing, among others, Doreen Massey's (2005) theory of spatiality and 'throwntogetherness' of places that refers to "situations in which people and things are put in the presence of each other and forced to confront, even if in a collateral way, the multiplicity of the urban" (Blok & Farías 2016: 11). Spatiality also implies certain topological formations that are not exactly present in traditional ANT. This means, for example, that the production of "artistic

objects cannot be studied without taking into account the production of spaces in which these object circulate" (ibid. 11). This resonates with my gathered understanding of gentrification resistance. For example, when street art is used as an act of resistance the art is often placed in specific locations for a very specific reason and the imagery usually reflects the surrounding community, thus creating a specific kind of a space.

Moreover, the concept of assemblies highlights "the contingent and situated processes by way of which new urban concerns, constituencies and publics come together across difference" (ibid. 17). In other words, it is about looking into public disruptions and realignments. Thus, assemblies offer a valuable way to analyze art and resistance as creating 'spaces of dissent' (Marrero-Guillamón 2016).

Finally, Blok and Farías warn against using ANT and assemblage thinking merely as conceptual add-ons for underlying frameworks such as neoliberal privatization or class politics. They contest this approach because it ultimately places politics outside the city as if politics were not present in urban assemblages in their own right. In other words, urbanity is not seen as political per se but only "*becomes* political through the historical transformation of capitalism into a heavily spatialized, scalar and urbanized process" (Blok & Farías 2016: 4; original emphasis). As I understand it, assemblage urbanism then means that any given phenomenon should be theorized by taking into account, not only political and economic, but also different and opposing social, cultural and material aspects of urban environments, and that causes and effects are too complex to be reduced to the dynamics of capitalism. Therefore, trying to explain gentrification only as a product of the neoliberal project, reduces it into a hollow concept that leaves no room to consider how it affects people's lives in the city, and the myriad of ways in which it is produced.

2.2 Anthropology of landscape

When talking about changing neighborhoods, landscape becomes a central aspect of the discussion; gentrification transforms the urban landscape. Much of anthropological literature on landscapes builds upon Tim Ingold's influential work. An interest in "the realities of lived experiences" (Ingold 2000: 1) is central to his theories, and his arguments often aim at dismantling the separation between humanity and nature, and

decentralizing the human in ethnographic encounters.

Landscape is a helpful concept to think about the city because it is at the same time, in a sense, very real, it is there for everyone to see. However, it also contains layers of realities not immediately available to an inexperienced eye. Indeed, landscapes, as Ingold (2000) has taught us, are not simply out there to be looked at but people live their lives in, identify with, and navigate through them. This 'dwelling' makes the landscape a lived experience. Although Ingold's theory on landscape draws on rural dwelling, the urban landscape can also be seen as a social, experiential and material gathering of people and things (Berglund 2019b). Urban landscapes are made up of layers upon layers of history, infrastructure, technology, policies, different experiences and identities that are constantly fluctuating, and full of "social and material entanglements and relations" (Berglund et al. 2019: 9). Thus, "[l]andscape gathers into itself sociability that remains hidden – ties and the agents they bind – and points to material processes and political decisions unfolding together" (Berglund 2019b: 207). In other words, landscapes are dynamic; people engage with, appropriate and contest them. They form a way to create and discuss identities. Combining history and politics, social relations and cultural perceptions, landscapes are also tense with conflicts.

Therefore, focusing merely on the phenomenological approach to landscape – as is implied in Ingold's approach – is not enough to analyze how profoundly configurations of political power transform places and experiences of landscape, and alter the "intimate knowledge people gain when they move within them" (Berglund et al. 2019: 9). In this light, as practices of urban planning transforms landscapes it is an exercise of political power that derails communities from their familiar lived realities.

Thus, applying this approach to gentrification reveals how capitalist processes affect landscapes and change lives. Moreover, combining dwelling and assembling approaches in a specific context can be productive in critiquing the more disturbing political aspects of socio-technical change (Berglund et al. 2019). These two approaches are somewhat complementary because assemblages also "decentre the human, and highlight multiple and contingent relations in ways that align well with studies of landscapes" (ibid. 21).

Beyond the powerful forces that transform landscapes, acts of resistance can also

change them through smaller material practices. 'Political materiality' thus refers to objects mediating relations of power between humans (Pilo'& Jaffe 2020). In the urban context then, "the absence of urban amenities and infrastructure can also give rise to political community formation, as alliances form around practices of construction and connection" (ibid. 12). This can be seen as a way to assert citizenship, or as literal construction of citizenship, and consequently claiming right to the city. This point is critical in understanding how people resisting gentrification position themselves within the political and physical landscapes of the city: through imagining alternative futures and ways of urban planning, they aim to (re)claim the city for the people.

2.3 Art and agency

Rather than using time and space to consider what art *is*, for the purpose of this thesis I am more interested in what art *does*. Central to this view is the idea that art objects have agency through which they act within society. When considering art and agency, one cannot completely overlook Alfred Gell's contribution. For Gell (1998: 7), anthropology of art means studying the "social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency". His theory has, however, been rather controversial, mainly because he argues against the importance of aesthetics and semiotics as theoretical foundations to consider art. Especially the writing off of semiotics is problematic also for my analysis, where the meanings attached to the art projects I studied are central for and inseparable from their function as community empowerment. Thus, Gell's theory is not centered in my analysis.

Another important contributor to the theory of art and agency is Bruno Latour. Behind Latour's (2005) actor-network theory (ANT) is the idea that objects are simultaneously composed of material, historical associations and meanings people bestow upon them. By actors Latour means any elements that make other elements depend on them, in other words, actors have agency that demands consequences. Latour also suggests that objects should be considered as social facts, as they are critical agents that create, sustain and extend social connections. He argues that the social should not be thought of as an order but rather as continuous transformations where actants produce one another as parts of networks.

In his theory on materiality Daniel Miller (2005) sums up the main difference between these two rivaling theorists of agency: ”while Latour is looking for the non-humans below the level of human agency, Gell is looking through objects to the embedded human agency we infer that they contain”. In other words, Gell does not permit agency as an inherent property of the objects themselves, they just distribute human agency, whereas Latour thinks that objects have agency of their own. According to Latour (2005, 71; original emphasis) “*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor”. Latour criticizes sociologists for asserting that objects do nothing and cannot originate social action when in fact, in his opinion, they can “‘express’ power relations, ‘symbolize’ social hierarchies, ‘reinforce’ social inequalities, ‘transport’ social power, ‘objectify’ inequality, and ‘reify’ gender relations” (ibid. 72).

However, instead of fully using ANT as a method like Latour insists it should be, I content myself with using the central ideas associated with it, that is, objects as actors and having agency, and thus by doing things these actors make a difference. Following Latour, art objects can be perceived as having agency, and this resonates with how art is both seen and utilized in resistance within gentrifying neighborhoods.

Others have also emphasized the social dimensions of art. According to Jacques Rancière (2014: 7) “art does not exist by itself”, but only “within a specific regime of identification that allows objects or performances made by very diverse techniques for very diverse destinations to be perceived as belonging to a unique mode of experience”. By this he means that art should not be merely perceived but understood through ‘the fabric of experience’ within which it is produced. Also Ingold (2000) has suggested that paintings should be understood as performance, an act of contemplation, and not just as preparation of objects for future contemplation. This view highlights the layers of significance intrinsic to art objects, which resonates with assemblage thinking. Especially significant for the analysis in this thesis is the suggestion of Isaac Marrero-Guillamón (2016) that art can create spaces of dissent as a form of resistance.

2.4 Resistance and the political

Much of the analysis in this thesis builds upon various acts of resistance to gentrification. The central premise is that resistance to gentrification serves as social and political critique. Today, city governments around the world operate without regard to limits, sustainability and accountability. As cities continue to grow and draw in investments, inequalities are on the rise. The polarization between corporations and the hyper-wealthy, and the rest of society has meant that people have been deprived of space and forced out of central locations in cities (Berglund 2019b). Thus, one form of resistance is also to look at "activism as a form of repair" (Berglund 2019a: 229) making the city a better place to live after the destruction that neoliberalism has had on public space and services, and consequently to the quality of urban life.

Resistance studies have a longstanding and diverse history in anthropology. Sherry Ortner (1995) has stated that, in the most rudimental sense, resistance is thought of as a reaction to power, or more precisely, domination. This seemingly simple binary between domination and resistance puts the resistors in a position of a subordinate. According to Ortner, however, resistors should be recognized for doing more than simply mechanically reacting to domination, which she argues has been the way resistance has mostly been analyzed, and thus romanticized.

James Scott (1985) has argued for the importance of everyday forms of resistance in peasant and slave societies. Although worlds apart, his insights on how resistance is not always necessarily about big events like organized rebellion or only a collective action, but actually takes subtler and more hidden forms, are helpful in analyzing how communities resist gentrification. Especially the idea of resistance as contesting, of what he calls, public and hidden 'transcripts' by, for example, linguistic tricks and metaphors, is something that speaks to my experience of resistance in New York.

Furthermore, resistance is political. According to Chantal Mouffe (2013: 2) 'the political' should be understood "as the antagonistic dimension which is inherent to all human societies" and also distinctive from 'politics'. By antagonism she means that in the political there always exists conflicts that have no rational solution. This view highlights a pluralism that implies the impossibility for all views to reconcile. Politics to her are the

various practices aiming at organizing human coexistence.

In the context of resistance that inherently involves the binary division between two groups – 'us' the resistors and 'them' the domination – that have different views on how things should be, Mouffe's theory proves valuable. She argues that "once we understand that every identity is relational and that the affirmation of a difference is a precondition for the existence of any identity – i.e. the perception of something 'other' which constitutes its 'exterior' – we can understand why politics, which always deals with collective identities, is about the constitution of a 'we' which requires as its very condition of possibility the demarcation of a 'they'" (ibid. 5). She also notes that there is always a possibility that the 'us/them' relation turns into a friend/enemy relation. This happens when the other starts to "question *our* identity and threaten *our* existence" (ibid. 5; original emphasis). This is a very interesting point when applied to the process of gentrification where the experience is precisely that the communities feel threatened. Affects also play a crucial role in the constitution of collective identities, which is why Mouffe (2013: 6) claims "it is impossible to understand democratic politics without acknowledging 'passions' as the driving force in the political field". And if anything, my interpretation of resistance to gentrification is that it people involved in it are very passionate about their stance.

Nevertheless, until quite recently any attempts to theorize or conceptualize resistance to gentrification, such as "[d]etailed studies of antigentrification protests, struggles, and activism" have been "sidelined by attention to the causes and effects of gentrification" (Lees et al. 2017: 346-347). This seems astounding in the light that gentrification still "remains a (if not the) key struggle with respect to social justice in cities worldwide" (ibid. 346–347). After all, "[h]istorically, people have always come together to argue and demonstrate in the public streets of the city, invariably seeking to reappropriate them and make society in the image of its citizens" (Merrifield & Swyngedouw 1996, 14). Also, the struggles against displacement have been central in the civil rights and social justice movements (Angotti & Morse 2017). Yet, for some reason gentrification resistance and activism have not been acknowledged as a cause that the wider public would take very seriously.

Following the same line of thought as Scott, Loretta Lees et al. (2017: 347) have argued

that “resistance to gentrification is composed of both overt opposition and everyday (often invisible) resistances, which are entangled and in a constant process of becoming”. They emphasize that “any understanding of resistance to gentrification needs to be tempered by the fact that individuals need to focus foremost on their individual survival and welfare, in addition to that of their families” (ibid. 347). Although I agree that at the bottom of the struggle against gentrification might be the individual’s fear of being displaced, it takes the community to make any difference. Ortner (1995) also concludes that there is no such thing as pure resistance because motivations behind it are always complex and contradictory.

I base my analysis, then, on the understanding that resistance is individual and collective, overt and covert, and in all forms political, and thus it also implies agency. Although agency is inherently part of resistance, it is worth noting that agency should neither be merely used as a synonym for resistance nor equated to actions of resistance to domination (Ahearn 2001). Also, solidarity and resilience are central to resistance. In my experience, although fighting on many fronts not least of which is against the hegemony of neoliberalism (see Mouffe 2013), people involved in gentrification resistance do not feel threatened or defeated in the face of such a seemingly formidable opponent. On the contrary, the communities seem to gain their collective strength from the enormity of the struggle. In a democratic process that is set up to disempower people, they need to empower themselves.

Gentrification resistance can take many forms from protests, to community organizing, art, conducting community plans, creating counter-spaces, setting up community gardens, and even making mindful consumer decisions. However, it is also important to acknowledge that some “forms of resistance and subversion of dominant values tend only to perpetuate the conservative imagery of cities as places of chaos, disintegration and moral decay rather than as spaces of where the prospect of hope, joy, and freedom resides” (Merrifield & Swyngedouw 1996, 14). Yet, at he heart of gentrification resistance, in my understanding, is precisely to resist these dominant oppressing and marginalizing stereotypes, and being defined from the outside. According to Ortner (2016: 66) anthropology of resistance “includes both ‘cultural critique’ – that is, the critical study of the existing order – and studies that emphasize thinking about alterna-

tive political end economic futures". As resistance to gentrification aims at more inclusive urban practices, it offers an arena to analyze the existing order as well as people's aspirations for an alternative future.

3 Gentrification in New York City

> Gentrification is transforming the city by driving out the poor and working class, including those who have chosen to give their lives over to unlucrative pursuits such as art, activism, social experimentation, social service. But gentrification is just the fin above water. Below is the rest of the shark: a new American economy in which most of us will be poorer, a few will be richer, and everything will be faster, more homogenous and more controlled and controllable.
>
> Rebecca Solnit (2002: 13–14)

New York City is one of those places people around the globe know at least by reputation. It is considered worldwide as a center, even the capital, of business, money, fashion and art. It is a place where the free market makes it possible to be wildly rich, and where flaunting one's wealth is rather expected than frowned upon. It is a place where money buys power; where dreams are made of. Even its characteristic skyline is recognizable for people that have never been there and seen it in person. These attributes, however, render New York a wildly paradoxical place in the light of my research topic that concentrates on the marginalized communities within the city.

It is true that New York City may already be a little overrepresented in literature about gentrification, but there is a reason for this: somehow, even as gentrification in New York already has a very long history, there still appears to be 'new' areas that real estate industry is 'discovering' all the time. In a neoliberal city where money is power, this is not surprising. This has lead to the wildly vigorous development of the city that never seems to stop; new and higher buildings appear all the time and almost out of nowhere. The increasingly privatized housing market that keeps forcing public and affordable housing out of its way makes this possible. In short, the economic structures of the city have real life effects on the lives of people living there. To me this makes the issues of gentrification and its ripple effects like resistance, stronger sense of place and belonging, and claims of right to the city so interesting.

The landscape of gentrification in today's New York is characterized by luxury apartment buildings, mass evictions, hipsters, seas of tourists, disappearance of small local businesses that used to sustain the communities, and the rise of corporate monoculture

that makes cities around the world look like any other place on the globe (see Brash 2010; Moss 2017). It is no longer adequate to define it simply as the 'gentry' moving to poorer neighborhoods. Today it is the super-wealthy, luxury class, and corporations invading these areas. This process has already been referred to as 'plutocratization' since the term gentrification does not really describe the current state of affairs anymore.

Characteristic to gentrification in the neoliberal American cities is how it pins cities and real estate developers against the local communities in an unequal power dynamic. Sure, it is easy to understand the logic behind a city wanting to improve its facilities and appearance, but at the same time this is in sharp contrast to the needs of its people having direct and often devastating effects on their lives. Typical to the discourse of urban development, regeneration, renewal, or whatever it in a given situation is called, is how it uses the language of colonialism: Chinatown is seen by the developers as 'the last frontier' in Manhattan New York, and beyond that Queens, for example, has been referred to as 'the new frontier' as if they were something yet to be conquered.

Historically New York City has been a peculiarity in the United States, not quite like any other city in the country. As elaborated by Moss (2017, 6): "From its beginnings, but especially since the late 1800's, New York was the unbridled engine of the nation's progressive culture and creativity, sustaining a diversity of people, feeding the world with art, ideas, and ways of life that pushed the boundaries of convention." However, despite its nearly mythical image and being branded as the capital of the world, "New York City is one of the most segregated and unequal cities in the world" (Angotti & Morse 2017, 10). Today, "[t]he divide between Wall Street (the 1 percent) and the 99 percent is gaping; the luxury condos selling for up to $100 million are not far from the 59,000 homeless people sleeping in shelters every night; and the billion-dollar bank head-quarters hover above the huge pool of service workers in bars and restaurants making sub-standard wages without any benefits" (ibid. 10–11).

Moreover, with a history of once being a major center of slave trade and a gateway to America for millions of immigrants over the centuries, the story of New York is riddled with ethnic and class conflicts, which has been manifested in geographic segregation of neighborhoods along racial and ethnic lines. But even though the Fair Housing Act offi-

cially prohibited systematic segregation already over 50 years ago, statistically black and white people still live separately (Angotti & Morse 2017, 11). The really unsettling side of this is that the racial separation "correlates with and reinforces unequal access to quality schools, healthy food, safe, streets, and overall quality of life" (ibid. 12). Furthermore, low-income residents and people of color are constantly under the threat of being displaced due to increasing home prices and rents. Class, race and identity politics are thus central aspects in gentrification.

A pivotal realization during my research was that gentrification is "only one more battle in the war over the streets" (Susser 2012, 52) of New York City. As a matter of fact, as a phenomenon it in itself is not that fascinating a research topic. What makes gentrification interesting, however, is the significance it imposes on people's lives in dictating the conditions in which they (must) live; it is present in their everyday lives by shaping the urban landscape wherein they dwell (see Ingold 2000; Berglund 2019b). Yet, it is imperative to note that gentrification is not an acting entity doing something, but the result of a myriad of measures put into action by policy-makers over several decades. In other words, gentrification is a part of a historical continuum that has shaped the lived-realities of New Yorkers. This is why it is also vital to recognize the general timeline of the politics and practices that have resulted in the current gentrification in New York City.

3.1 Historical context

> Where there had been increasing ethnic and economic diversity, there would be slums. Where there had been a thriving working class of color, there would be poverty. Where there had been strong social bonds, there would be disconnection and dysfunction.
>
> Jeremiah Moss (2017: 65)

Many academics have traced the history of gentrification in New York City and how it connects to certain historical policies and practices (e.g. Angotti & Morse 2017; Brash 2010; Patch 2004; Smith 1996, 2006; Susser 2012, Zukin 2010), and this subchapter reflects their common observations. Also assembling the same story Jeremiah Moss (2017) has made concise and cutting remarks on gentrification in New York through linking the historical continuum to his personal encounters with dozens of locals from

residents to artists and small business owners. The premise of most of these arguments is that, even though New York is considered as a "mythical 'melting pot'" (Angotti & Morse 2017: 10) of people from different origins, tensions between ethnic and racial groups have significantly shaped the history and the present landscape of the city.

After the Civil War in 1800s, New York saw an influx of newly emancipated slaves and impoverished European immigrants. Irish Catholics followed by millions of Italian Catholics, Russian Jews, among many more were met with "hostile Nativists, Anglo-Americans rooted in Puritan origins" (Moss 2017: 57) who saw the newcomers, and Catholicism especially, as a great threat. The immigrants were not recognized as equals to the Anglo-Americans, in other words, they were not white enough, and faced discrimination that would go on for generations.

Cramped first in tenements on the Lower East Side, Manhattan, the immigrants brought about major cultural changes, radical new ideas and ways of life. Having escaped poverty and oppression in Europe, "they brought socialism and anarchism, organized and unionized, lifting the working class to power" (Moss 2017: 57). According to Moss, this was also the time when American bohemianism developed, along which also came a more tolerant attitude towards sexual nonconformity, and New York became known as a place for liberation, and of freedom. This was the beginning of New York as the welcoming, progressive and socially liberal sanctuary city, an image that has to some extent endured to date.

But the city elites, as Moss notes, did not like the lazy and dirty Europeans corrupting the American values, morality and government. Thus, here lie the origins of racist urban policies in America: to take back the city from them, the ethnic immigrants were stealthily turned into middle-class whites, which would turn them against black and brown communities.

In the United States, "[i]nterracial, lower-class mixing has always been a threat to the power elites" (Moss 2017: 61). The roots of systemic racism, that still affect the society today, date back to colonial America where white servants and black slaves were separated by instigating racial contempt between the groups. The "poor whites were given special privileges over enslaved blacks", meaning they "could police slaves and their

labor was protected from black competition" (ibid. 61). This system was enforced also in New York in the early twentieth century as industrial jobs were reduced, and the ethnic immigrants and black people had to compete for resources. And, as it happens, being white(r) was an advantage.

Thus, the deindustrialization of New York City is a key point in the history of gentrification too; the "death of industrial New York was planned by a privately organized group of bankers and real estate developers", who did not "like all those blue-collar, multiethnic people taking up space on valuable Manhattan land" (Moss 2017: 62). This group, the Regional Plan Association (RPA) "starting in 1922, schemed to destroy working-class New York by zoning away industrial areas and claiming those territories for finance, insurance, and real estate" (ibid. 62). The RPA's decentralizing agenda, however, was only the start.

Beyond the local level, the often-characteristic messiness, diversity, openness to social liberalism, sexual freedom, racial mixing and alien ideas one finds in cities had made even the Federal Government of the United States anti-urban. Moreover, the National Housing Act of 1934, a part of President Roosevelt's New Deal designed to make housing and home mortgages more affordable after the Great Depression of the 1920s, had actually worked towards "breaking up urban immigrant enclaves and converting ethnics into full-fletched whites assimilated into Anglo-Saxon righteousness" (Moss 2017: 63). This was in large part achieved by a practice of 'redlining', that is, of color-coding neighborhoods according to assessed investment risk for the banks. Newly founded Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) were employed to carry out the task. What followed was that predominantly white neighborhoods were afforded first-grade status, whereas predominantly black neighborhoods were condemned fourth-grade, dangerous, and got colored red on the maps. At first, even Jewish or Italian neighborhoods were not seen as American enough to be first grade.

Accordingly, almost all of northern Brooklyn, much of the South Bronx, Harlem, the Lower East Side, and other parts of lower Manhattan were redlined, and deemed to suffer from disinvestment. At the same time, the FHA was enticing working- and middle-class white and ethnic masses to abandon the city by offering low-interest loans in the

new suburbs. People of color were not offered such loans and were forced "to stay behind in neighborhoods fracturing under the pressure of anti-urban federal policy" (Moss 2017, 64). In effect, then, the FHA pushed for segregation and made it public policy in cities. In a nutshell, by endorsing homeownership the FHA got the "urban ethnics to literally buy into suburban American whiteness and its privileges" (ibid. 65). The 'white flight' from the inner New York City had begun, and the practice of redlining went on for decades, during which much of the city atrophied.

One of the most prominent and successful figures in city development in New York has been urban planner Robert Moses in the middle of the twentieth century (see Jacobs 1961; Moss 2017; Susser 2012; Zukin 2010). He was notoriously greedy and openly despised the poor and people of color. Stories of him trying to prevent black people from using public pools, or refusing to build parks and playgrounds in low-income neighborhoods still circulate today when people talk about the past. It is claimed that he built bridges over the freeways leading away from the city intentionally so low that buses, the main transportation method for the poor and people of color, could not run under them, thus preventing the people he despised seeking leisure outside the city (Susser 2012). Supported by the Federal Government he destroyed homes and local businesses in working-class and non-white neighborhoods in the name of 'urban renewal', "a euphemism for racial cleansing" (Moss 2017: 66).

It is written in the Constitution of the United States that governments have the power to take private property for "public use" for "just compensation", a policy called the right of eminent domain. With the Housing Act of 1949 that provided federal financing for 'slum clearance' programs in American cities, eminent domain was used to seize private property that was determined as blight and could then be resold for profit-making developments. Local low-income people and communities of color in these 'slums' were disregarded as Moses bulldozed through the city and built highways in the place of neighborhoods (Jacobs 1961; Zukin 2010). Consequently, "[u]prooted and traumatized, the displaced moved into overcrowded ghettos like Harlem, and the South Bronx, where they crammed into smaller spaces, separated from extended family, friends, churches, and other ties that keep a community connected and functioning" (Moss 2017: 67).

Thus, communities of color were eventually forced to move deeper into the outer bor-

oughs of New York City where the working-class white ethnics had settled. The white residents, terrified of the hazardous reputation now bestowed especially upon black people through racist public policy, were then agitated by real estate speculators. Since the 1950s these 'blockbusters' scammed people to sell their homes fast before the blacks would come and ruin their neighborhoods and property values (Angotti & Morse 2017; Moss 2017). When the whites had left, the empty houses were sold to black people at enormous profits by the same predatory blockbusters**.** And as the banks still would not give them loans, black communities were forced to resort to secondary financing with impossible mark-ups that these blockbusters offered. Under such financial pressures people were forced to live in overcrowded houses, take on multiple jobs, and live in constant stress, which resulted in increased social disorder. This, in turn, resulted in even more whites fleeing to the suburbs, and by 1960 almost "2 million white New Yorkers has fled town, many of them working-class, a Democratic group long credited as progressive, the salt of New York's agitated earth" (Moss 2017: 69). What they had left behind would create the ghettos of Crown Height, Bushwick, and so many other neighborhoods, which ironically have now once again become hot currency in the gentrifying city.

The 1960s was a decade of major political shifts in the United States. As New York City was rezoned in 1961, industrial land was reduced even further, meaning that more and more manufacturing jobs were destroyed, and the distress of poor people of color deepened. In 1964 President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law, which made segregation illegal and outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. During the election later that year, his Republican challenger Barry Goldwater opposed strongly such big government interventions claiming that segregation was the business of states to which the President should not interfere. Even though Johnson won the election, a "new GOP was born – conservative, anti-government, pro-business, and invested in institutional racism" (Moss 2017, 70). The new conservative Republicans "used anxieties about race and taxes to turn the white working class against poor people of color and the social-democratic New Deal, simultaneously realigning their sympathies with big business and the wealthy" (ibid. 70), something that still characterizes the Grand Old Party today.

The end of the decade saw peaceful Civil Rights Movement turn more intense as black rage erupted in northern cities resulting in civil unrest and increasing violence in the inner-city neighborhoods. This was the final straw for the white working-class now fearful of and resenting black and brown people, who they perceived living comfortably on welfare financed by their hard earned tax dollars. Thus, began white backlash. Following anti-leftist manipulation that recast “the left as the true power elite, a bunch of college-educated dictators who looked down their noses at workers” (Moss 2017: 71), liberalism had also become a dirty word associated with communism, the archenemy of the US. Without realizing it, the white working-class had aligned with the financial elite, and their “backlash would change the city, giving rise to Mayors Ed Koch and Rudy Giuliani, both sons of the ethnic working class who would guide New York in a whole new direction” (Moss 2017: 73) in the upcoming decades.

Perhaps nobody has disliked New York as much as President Nixon. In secret White House tapes from 1972, later released to the public, he is recorded saying: “Goddamn New York”, a city he perceived being filled with “Jews and Catholics and blacks and Puerto Ricans”. He was recorded saying that there is a “law of the jungle where some things don't survive”, and, “Maybe New York shouldn't survive. Maybe it should go through a cycle of destruction" (Rosenbaum 2003). Using the war on drugs as a scapegoat, Nixon would attack his two main enemies he saw sprawling in cities: the antiwar left and black people. Accordingly, the hippies were associated with marijuana and black people with heroin, and criminalizing both legitimized arresting their leaders, raiding their homes, and breaking up their meetings. This “strategy worked to further poison the hearts and minds of America against the city” (Moss 2017, 74).

Even after being gradually segregated into ghettos and practically forced into poverty, the people of color still would not leave the city; where would they have gone. This was a problem for the power elites who now needed a new plan of attack that manifested into benign neglect, or seemingly doing nothing. In line with previous racist and classist practices of deindustrialization, redlining and urban renewal came the infamous burning of apartment buildings in low-income neighborhoods in the 1970s (e.g. Moss 2017; Susser 2012; Berman 1996). Doing nothing meant that the city, under the disguise of saving money, “closed firehouses, stopped fixing alarm call boxes and hydrants, and

lengthened response times in poor minority neighborhoods", and "let its most vulnerable people burn" as "the night skies turned bright with tenement flames" (Moss 2017, 75–76) in the South Bronx, central Brooklyn and the Lower East Side.

At the same time, New York City was declining into bankruptcy, and the poor were blamed for socially liberal New York's financial failure. When in fact, in addition to changes in global, national and regional capital, at least a part of the city's fiscal problems can be traced back to the reduced tax base caused by deindustrialization and the white flight. At the time real estate capital also fled from large parts of the city "resulting in widespread abandonment of housing in the South Bronx, central Brooklyn and Harlem, all communities of color" (Angotti & Morse 2017, 62). So, a scheme called planned shrinkage emerged, coined by city housing and development administrator Roger Starr, to tackle the problem with austerity measures by withdrawing city services like schools, hospitals, public transportation and fire services from these poor neighborhoods (e.g. Angotti & Morse 2017; Moss 2017; Susser 2012). Starr claimed that this would induce the undesirable minority populations to leave, allowing the valuable land to be redeveloped after the cycle of decline ended. But, his plan faced fierce opposition from members of the City Council and he resigned. What happened instead was that the people who stayed in these neighborhoods had come together and organized to press for fairer housing programs, which helped them preserve their communities and neighborhoods (Angotti & Morse 2017). Starr's ideas, however, are still mirrored in the mentality of real estate developers today, who perceive neighborhoods as empty canvases, or new frontiers, as if the people who live there do not even exist.

Thus, it is no coincidence that a parallel between gentrification has so easily been drawn, and to some extent sustained in people's minds, with renaissance, revitalization and progress, as the phenomenon first appeared in the aftermath of a significant fiscal crisis that had driven New York to the verge of bankruptcy in 1975. However, it is important to recognize that the situation in the 1970s is far from the kind of hyper-gentrification the city is facing today.

Neil Smith (2006) has distinguished three waves of gentrification in New York City. The first, sporadic gentrification, from the 1950's to mid-70s was small-scale and quaint as 'the new gentry' fled the suburbs to make a life in the city's affordable areas. A new

generation of middle- and upper class Americans started to return to the city after their parents had fled it during the white flight only a decade or two before. This “new professional upper-class, an achievement-oriented gentry” was, as the New York Times in 1979 put it, “forced to move into and upgrade marginal areas” (Fleetwood 1979). Furthermore, “[t]his new breed of professionals [was] willing to put up with smaller apartments, dirty streets and crime in order to live in chic neighborhoods” (ibid.). They also brought about a shift from manufacturing to ideas industry, in other words, from blue-collar to white-collar occupation dominating the jobs the city had to offer. However, the article also speculated that: “Ironically, the ethnic diversity that is drawing the gentry back to the city, the cultural heterogeneity that has always been the source of so much of New York's character and energy, may become lost in a forest of homogenized highrises and rows of renovated brownstones” (ibid.). And, in many people’s opinion, it has. Also, the same kind if mentality that ‘the new gentry’ had towards the ‘chic’ neighborhoods forty years ago, is still a source of conflict in gentrifying neighborhood today; the newcomers are criticized of being inconsiderate, negligent and entitled.

The Second Wave of gentrification from late 1970’s to 1989 was marked by the city government’s involvement and its political reorientation towards neoliberalism. Under the leadership of Mayor Ed Koch (1978–1989) the City Hall aspired to recreate New York, a process in which it turned away from its citizens and embraced big business, tourists, real estate developers and high-earning professionals on Wall Street (Moss, 2017). David Harvey (1989: 3) has called this a shift from managerialism to entrepreneurialism in local government, the former meaning the “practices of earlier decades primarily focused on local provision of services, facilities and benefits to urban populations”, and the latter “the exploration of new ways in which to foster and encourage local development and employment growth”. This shift also meant that the city started to compete with other cities for outside resources, which was fuelled by government subsidies, such as tax abatements, for corporations and real estate developers. This resulted, among other things, in mass-evictions of poor people in inner-city areas followed by an increase in homelessness that in turn tainted the new image of New York that the City Hall was trying to polish. Hence, the NYPD was deployed to push the homeless out of the city, but people pushed back and started to realize that gentrification was indeed planned and targeted intentionally the disenfranchised communities.

Gentrification was starting to be perceived for what it is: “an essential part of city government’s master plan to take back the city from the poor, the working class, people of color, homosexuals, artists, socialists, and other undesirables” (Moss 2017: 36).

When New York City fell into economic depression from 1989 to 1993, property values and rents plummeted once again. After that Smith’s Third Wave, or generalized, gentrification began around 1994, and really picked up speed in the 2000s under Mayor Bloomberg. Now gentrification spread further away from the central city, little by little to every conceivable nook and cranny of the city’s neighborhoods, from Manhattan to deep into Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens. Trendy restaurants, chain stores, sleek office towers, brand-name museums and other tourist destinations now dominate the streetscapes; the unique character of places has been replaced with monotony (Moss 2017); New York City has lost its soul (Zukin 2010).

Smith (1996) has called the 1990s New York ‘the revanchist city’ ascertaining gentrification as an act of revenge. This revenge refers to the polarized division between the city’s elite and ‘the undesirables’, the latter of which have, for a long time, been blamed by the former for the decay of the city. The processes of gentrification and resistance against it, then, represent the opponents in a paradoxical tug-of-war between the elites and the people to take back the city, as both sides seem to think the other has stolen it from them. The rhetoric of revenge and taking back the city highlights the power dynamics between the powerful and the rest that will remain central throughout the analysis in this thesis.

3.2 Zoning and “affordable” housing

As suggested above, gentrification in New York City today is inseparable from historical practices that have defined the direction of and policies through which the city has been developed. On this note, a few words should also be said about the current city planning and its key issues relating to gentrification.

First of all, New York City has never adopted a long-term comprehensive citywide plan, and instead uses zoning. This means that the city is developed one section at a time instead of considering the big picture. The instrument for land use and regulation is the

Zoning Resolution established in 1916, rewritten in 1961 and constantly revised, that broadly controls whether land is used for residential, commercial or industrial use, how much floor area can be built on the land, and how much land has to remain unbuilt (Angotti & Morse 2017). During the past decade, the city has been in the midst of several massive rezoning battles that have followed Mayor Michael Bloomberg's (2002–2014) goal to transform many old industrial and mix-use "neighborhoods into playgrounds for high-stakes real estate investment" (ibid. 13), and promote the luxury city that would attract both money and people who have a lot of it (Brash 2010).

The reality is that New York City has a severe housing problem. Whereas low-income people are prized out of their homes due to rising rents and homelessness is on the rise, the billionaire class owns buildings that stand vacant. City planners continue to claim that zoning changes are essential for solving the housing problem and rezoning is needed to be able to provide affordable housing. The twisted side of zoning is that, when the Department of City Planning (DCP) talks about rezoning an area, it leads to real estate speculation that, in turn, leads to a seemingly heightened risk of displacement within the neighborhood. This then leads to a seemingly increased need for affordable housing that eventually just legitimizes the DCP rezoning plans (Angotti & Morse 2017).

Quite in the opposite of his predecessor, the current mayor Bill de Blasio ran for office on a platform of tackling the rampant inequalities in the city. He explicitly claims to be committed to "fighting the income inequality that has created 'A Tale of Two Cities' across the five boroughs" (City of New York), referring to the classic Charles Dickens' novel set partly in Paris during the French Revolution. Accordingly, he has promised to create 200,000 new affordable housing units. Yet, now in office, he is currently proposing new rezonings located largely in communities of color. These developments plaguing low-income neighborhoods have for decades put a lot of pressure onto neighborhood activists across the city (Angotti & Morse 2017). The power relations unfolding between the city officials and the local residents were also the starting point for my interest in gentrification in the first place.

Today resistance to gentrification in the many neighborhoods of New York City is largely about fighting for affordable housing and against displacement, a threat facing especially low-income communities of color. In deed, even the UN lists the right to ad-

equate (and affordable) housing as a basic socio-economic human right. However, defining what is affordable is open to different interpretations, and the top-down definition that the officials use and developers deploy does not usually correlate with the income levels in these communities.

The current crisis of housing affordability originates from the fiscal crisis in the 1970s after which all levels of government disinvested in public housing programs. Cutting the funds led to deteriorating conditions and public housing was associated with crime and accused of fostering a culture of poverty (Angotti & Morse 2017). New York City has historically had the largest public housing stock in the country, and somewhat surprisingly it has managed to maintain most of it intact from major redevelopment and privatization. Yet, no new public housing has been built since the 1980s. And in recent years there has been an increasing interest in the real estate industry to redevelop centrally located public housing sites; Mayor Bloomberg, for example, proposed "to build market-rate housing on eight public housing sites in choice Manhattan locations" (Angotti & Morse 2017: 67).

Furthermore, from the 1980s on direct public funding was replaced with public-private partnerships where governments provide subsidies to financial investors and private developers, claiming that the new housing thus developed would then 'trickle down'[1] to low-income people. In reality the new tax incentives, bond financing and liberal zoning measures "made real estate development in New York City a most profitable enterprise" (ibid. 67), and created a housing boom that resulted in increased land values and rents that have been displacing people ever since.

Hence, there is a lot of community pressure for low-income housing, and the concept of affordable housing has been deployed to meet this need. But as mentioned above, although on paper it appears to benefit low-income people, a deeper look reveals that affordable housing actually is quite problematic. There are two major problems. First, newly developed affordable housing units are actually not affordable to people who live in the neighborhoods where they are to be built. This is because the eligibility for these

[1] The 'trickle-down effect' of wealth assumes that all prosper if the rich get richer.

new housing units is determined by using the Area Median Income (AMI) as a benchmark. Based on incomes for the entire city and some of the suburban areas, the AMI is typically "four to five times higher than the median income in low-income neighborhoods, which excludes the majority of existing residents from eligibility for the new units" (Angotti & Morse 2017, 68). Furthermore, the affordable units are allocated using a lottery system that preferences people with excellent credit ratings. The problem here is that excellent credit is disproportionately harder for people of color to maintain because of discriminatory and predatory practices, and "due to stop-and frisk practices and the mass incarceration of blacks and Latinos, many are unable to qualify because they have been arrested at some point in their lives" (ibid. 69).

The second problem is that guarantees of affordability are not usually permanent as requirements may expire in only few years, and compliance is also hard for the government to monitor. Thus, "New York City's investment of billions of dollars on affordable housing have basically subsidized real estate speculation" (ibid. 69). And to make things even worse, "government has never undertaken a study to determine whether these programs have contributed to the displacement of low-income minority communities" (ibid. 69).

There seems to be an air of obscurity behind which many of the plans for city development are hoped to escape from closer scrutiny; zoning appears complex and highly technical to hide its political nature, and promises for affordable housing disguise redirecting public funds to real estate industry. However, many residents in gentrifying areas facing upzoning are by now acutely aware of how these processes work and see "affordable housing as the fig leaf that will ease the way for widespread development and displacement" (Angotti & Morse 2017, 69). The reality is that most areas targeted for rezoning will get rezoned, and dedicating to affordable housing will benefit the developers not the local community that faces displacement.

3.3 Encounters in and with the city

To contextualize the arguments made in this the following chapters I will now give a short introduction to some of the ethnographic encounters on which I have based my analyses. Although these descriptions only represent certain individuals and specific situations, they outline a very similar narrative to many other stories of living in New York City I heard and read during my research. Thus, they are meant to help the reader to get an idea of the complex relationships people have with their city.

One of the most influential people for the formation of this thesis was Henry, a young man in his twenties living and working in Bushwick. He was born in Brooklyn to a single mother of five and spent his early years living in many different neighborhoods around the city. By the time of his early teens his family had been forced to move out of their home multiple times already. However, one constant was always Bushwick where until a decade ago most of his extended family, most importantly his grandmother, lived.

Most of the neighborhoods he lived in growing up were poor and economically deprived by the city, and thus considered dangerous. However, for him Bushwick never felt unsafe. He remembers the Bushwick of his childhood through his senses: it smelled like food carts, sounded like loud calls and blaring car speakers, and looked browner. These are the things that he still associates with the feeling of safety. For him the biggest change in Bushwick today is the intangible energy of the neighborhood, the sense of being invited, or more precisely, not invited.

The feeling of belonging has been a struggle throughout his life. Henry's family is Puerto Rican but he is light skinned and was not really taught Spanish at a young age. Thus, he has struggled even within his own community because he sounds white and passes for a hipster with his nice bike. Yet, in other situations he gets immediately labeled as the Latino guy.

Growing up Henry's family did not have a support system that was in a position to have been able to offer them money or a place to stay, so they had to adapt a survival method of being clever about finances and working hard. Yet, even having lived with socioeco-

nomic precarity and instability from moving around a lot, today Henry is more affected by how gentrification erases history and displaces his people, than how it might directly affect himself. Thus, after getting an art degree in college he wanted to work for his community and has since organized activism and art projects in Bushwick and other parts of Brooklyn.

Sam on the other hand, moved to Brooklyn in his twenties a few decades ago. As an Afro-Caribbean man from Boston his life experiences had lead him to activism and advocating for justice and equality for the black community at a very young age. Already in middle school he successfully organized a petition to get school busses for his predominantly black neighborhood. Later, arriving to New York and quickly realizing how black residents in his neighborhood started to become increasingly displaced as new development started to appear, he started organizing the community to fight gentrification.

After over a decade of organizing for housing rights and gentrification resistance, and battling the same issues of tenant harassment and racist practices and police brutality towards people of color over and over again, his stamina to keep going is admirable. For him it is about resilience; he has the resources and the knowledge to help people, so he does not have the luxury of being able to turn away and ignore the problem. He also added that today organizing is much easier than it was before social media when a lot of activism was about calling people on the phone and its reach was much more limited. However, he emphasized that activism on social media is not enough, there still is a lot of work that needs to be done offline and the physical presence of people in protesting, for example, is vital.

One time I met with Sam in Downtown Brooklyn near where he used to live. We had lunch at a barbeque place that he had picked out because it was owned by a person of color. This was important for him because amenities are usually the first thing that people notice change in a gentrifying neighborhood. So, he always tries to make a point of supporting small and especially people of color owned businesses. However, he points out that he is only a human and sometimes even he is lured into the cool new cafes and

restaurants that pop up in his neighborhood. For example, he jokingly tells how he had been avoiding a new donut shop[2] for a long time but had finally given in to the temptation, "and damn the gentrified donuts were delicious". Thus, he gets why people have a hard time understanding the scope of gentrification and how their everyday actions play out in that equation. And that is exactly why he needs to keep organizing.

In addition to more personal interactions, my fieldwork involved countless transient encounters with people and places, some of which will be elaborated later in the analysis. I met artists and activists, bar tenders and sellers at flee markets, young professionals and pensioners, and people born and raised in New York as well as undocumented immigrants. I walked around different neighborhoods, rode the subway, looked at and talked about art, went to museums and exhibitions, and sat in parks. The city itself was an important encounter that put a lot of things into perspective for me. Excited about conducting research in New York, and preoccupied with ambitious plans and anxieties of doing a good job, it took me a couple of weeks to realize to actually stop and look around me. Only then I started to slowly grasp the myriad of ways in which the city creates the lived realities of everyday life of millions of people.

[2] During my fieldwork I found that donuts, as well as bagels, were an often talked about topic in regards to gentrification of culture.

4 Landscape of gentrification

When thinking about landscape, the first instinct is to describe what you can see in your immediate environment. However, anthropological studies on landscape have suggested that it is much more than what you can observe with your senses (Berglund 2019b; Ingold 2000; Lounela et al. 2019). According to Tim Ingold (2000: 193) "the landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein". In his view landscape makes men and is made by men, to use a gender-biased term. In other words, people are the product of their environment, and vice versa. Ingold has argued that hunter-gatherers learn through an education of attention and thus become knowledgeable by watching, listening and feeling, or dwelling in, their environment. To some extent, the same is true with city dwellers as well (Berglund 2019b).

Nevertheless, visuality is still a significant aspect of landscape. Indeed, looking back and thinking about the urban landscapes I dwelled in during my fieldwork, my memories revolve around mental images of different places I encountered and the experiences I link to them. Visuality was also something that was brought up repeatedly during my fieldwork in interactions with people as they recalled what their neighborhood used to look like, or how art and other visuals help make protest and other acts of resistance more tangible and less transient by making them a part of the physical landscape. In deed, Sharon Zukin (2010: 101) argues that streets and buildings of an old neighborhood can serve as reminders of an alternative time as a certain sense of the past "intrudes to and challenges the present". These 'kairological images' create an interesting dimension to analyze the contrasting class worlds that coexist in landscapes. Thus, focusing on the visual can offer a valuable approach to studying the urban.

However, visuals have often been used merely to serve as anecdotal evidence of more extensive arguments (Patch, 2004). Smith (1996), for example, has used glaring images of antigentrification protesters in the Lower East Side in arguing that 'revanchist' urban politics aim to displace and punish the poor and the working class. There is value in Smith's argument and he makes an important point, but I think visuals can be far more fruitful if treated as data for analysis rather than evidence to prove a point.

In this chapter I will analyze the landscapes of two Brooklyn neighborhoods that have

been transformed by gentrification: Williamsburg where I lived during my fieldwork, and Bushwick that is currently facing intense gentrification pressures. The two neighborhoods are in many respects very similar: both used to be active industrial areas that employed vast working-class communities. This has shaped and is still reflected in their physical landscapes; they have been homes to communities of color and especially Latino populations have been prominent in both; and both have lately been characterized as the loci of the city's art scene. The difference is that the recent developments have occurred in different moments in time.

4.1 Williamsburg and Bushwick

Arriving in New York I took the subway from JFK to Marcy Avenue stop in Williamsburg. The J train runs through Queens and Brooklyn above ground on elevated tracks over the streets. Already that first journey offered me initial glimpses of the landscape of the neighborhoods in which I would be spending the following weeks. The landscape through the subway windows was generally quite flat and passing through different neighborhoods most houses were relatively low. However, the size and density of buildings and the amount of people out on the streets gradually grew as the journey went on. The train passed through residential areas and industrial sites, and commercial activities were clearly connected to transportation hubs and continued along high streets. There was graffiti on many walls near the train tracks. Here and there you could catch a glimpse of the Manhattan skyline looming in the distance.

In Brooklyn the J train runs directly over Broadway, an important thoroughfare connecting the inner neighborhoods all the way to the East River and Manhattan over the Williamsburg Bridge. It serves as a border between the neighborhoods of Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant, and also divides Williamsburg roughly in half. On the southern side of Williamsburg lives a large Hasidic Jewish community, whereas the northern side houses a significant Latino population, as well as the increasing number of middle- and high-income newcomers that are the result of intense gentrification of the neighborhood in the past few decades (see Patch 2004; Susser 2012). Geographically Williamsburg is also divided into North and South Streets with Grand Street in the middle that runs parallel to Broadway a few blocks north. The predominant Latino community has

historically lived on the south side of Grand Street and calls it Los Sures. As the neighborhood keeps transforming and new development has taken over or completely replaced traditional working-class tenements with towering apartment buildings, the living space of the Latino community is shrinking still.

Once I got off the subway I started to haul my luggage towards my accommodation on Grand Street about a kilometer away. In the immediate vicinity of the station I passed by banks, McDonald's and Dunkin' Donuts, small stores, some street vendors, a grocery store that had set up fruit and vegetable stands out on the street, a funeral home, a bagel shop, and a small green area. Typical to cities in America, Williamsburg is also laid out as a geometrical grid of larger avenues crossed with smaller streets. The avenues are characterized by commercial spaces whereas the streets tend to be more residential. For the most part the streets on the south side seem quite uniform: they are lined with houses typically three to six stories high, most of which are cladded with brick or stone, old and refurbished houses still dominate the landscape even though there are some new buildings here and there that do not quite seem to fit in. Some imitate the aesthetics of the old houses but some are conspicuously modern with eye-catching metal and glass details. There are trees, small parks and playgrounds; grocery stores, delis, and restaurants. Everything seems generally well kept and the streets are clean. Yet, there are also some vacant lots that are fenced in and grow weeds.

And then there is street art. On my initial walk I had not really paid attention to it until coming across a huge mural covering the entire wall of a large building in one street corner. It had bright colors and included pictures of many people and some text. As I was tired from traveling and dragging my heavy luggage, I did not stop to think about the mural too much and just passed by. However, it lingered with me and now I was noticing street art everywhere.

The further west towards the East River my journey continued, the more the physical landscape began to change. Suddenly there were considerably more construction sites, and taller and larger buildings started to dominate the view. By the time I reached Wythe Avenue, the second to last avenue before the river, the scale of the development in the area really hit me. As the Williamsburg waterfront used to be mainly an industrial area, the old residential houses there are smaller, scarcer and built in between factories

and warehouses. As the area was recently upzoned, the landscape now is a weird mix of the old warehouses and pockets of the old tenements, combined with construction cranes, new pristine commercial buildings, boutique stores, hip cafes and luxury housing, some towering over twenty stories high. The location of my accommodation on Grand Street on the border of the south and north sides of Williamsburg, and very close to the redevelopments on the waterfront proved to offer an excellent point of departure for starting my research.

Williamsburg is connected directly to the Lower East Side, Union Square and Greenwich Village through a subway line, the L, that runs along the 14th Street in Manhattan. This is of interest because those were the areas from where the initial working-class immigrants in the turn of the twentieth century started to move to Williamsburg, and who are still reflected in the large Jewish and Latino populations in the area (Susser 2012). Of course, the L has since brought a lot more people to Williamsburg, and has undoubtedly had a significant role in its gentrification. One insightful activist I spoke to actually called the L "the gentrification train" that has literally moved newcomers deeper into the neighborhoods of Brooklyn.

There certainly is a pattern that has moved waves of people along the path of the L train. First there were the waves of Jewish, Italian, Polish and Latino immigrants who were displaced from Manhattan due to the racist city policies, and settled to Williamsburg. After they had left Manhattan, artists and other bohemians and radicals seized those formerly working-class areas and the abandoned warehouses. Then the areas started to attract the middle-class and the prices began to climb again, and the artists starting in the 1990s followed the immigrants' path along the L to Williamsburg. As now even the middle-class has increasingly been priced out of Manhattan, they too have moved to Williamsburg and other areas in Brooklyn. And what followed again was that the artists have now been mostly prized out of Williamsburg too and are moving to Bushwick, a couple of stops away on the L. Considering this pattern, it comes as no surprise that Bushwick is currently in the midst of a heated battle against gentrification as the city is planning to rezone parts of the neighborhood to allow new residential development in the neighborhood's manufacturing zones. In the past decade the mainly people of color neighborhood has seen a considerable influx of middle-class white peo-

ple. These changing demographics also change the racial and ethic landscapes of neighborhoods, a point I will analyze closer in the following subchapters.

In today's Williamsburg, near the L train subway station along Bedford Avenue one finds an Apple Store, Whole Foods Market, Equinox gym and countless clothing boutiques, vintage stores, cafes, restaurants and bars. Famous street artists have covered many walls with beautiful murals. Weirdly, there is also a huge amount of pet supply stores and veterinary practices around the neighborhood, apparently the newcomers have a lot of house animals that need special care. Further west towards the East River one finds new hotels with rooftop bars, a Starbucks, stores like Urban Outfitters and Gentry, antique and flee markets, and a weekly open-air food market in East River State Park overlooking the Manhattan skyline serving food from all around the world right next to the massive new waterfront apartment buildings. Accordingly, Williamsburg has also become a very popular tourist destination in the recent years and the streets and the subway are crowded with hoards of people marveling the spectacle of daily life in this 'cool' neighborhood (Zukin 2010).

These kinds new of amenities are the result of a specific kind process, as Melissa Checker (2018) calls it, environmental gentrification. Current urban development practices have created uneven environments where low-income communities of color are not only vulnerable to the risks from for-profit development but also climate change. As environmental sustainability has become a rising concern, seemingly environmentally conscious practices have been employed also in urban development. Thus, "[n]ew waterfront parks, bike lanes, farmer's markets, and other environmentally minded amenities [now characteristic to gentrified areas like Williamsburg] also appealed to the progressive, sophisticated, and liberal tastes of luxury city residents" (Checker 2018: 200).

However, this rebranded image of the neighborhood is in stark contrast to the lived reality of the low-income communities that still reside there too. First of all, the landscape that is produced to conform to taste of the higher socioeconomic classes and tourists deprives the local community of vital amenities such as regular grocery stores, laundry services, and public schools and health centers. Indeed, it proved difficult even for me to find a grocery store in the neighborhood that would not break the bank in the long

run. I was in no position to afford the $10 boxes of fancy granola and organic apples $2 each that the 'harvest markets' of the neighborhood had to offer. Even a seemingly mundane chore of doing grocery shopping is affected by gentrification, thus having tangible effects on everyday life.

As noted, gentrification brings with it a different set of aesthetic ideals and consumer habits, and thus changes the appearance of neighborhoods. It has a direct impact on the physical urban landscape, but it also has a much deeper impact on the dwellers that have lived in those landscapes for a long time. Suddenly, their familiar places have become unrecognizable as new buildings start to rise, streets and subway platforms are being cleaned up and increasingly patrolled by the police, basic amenities have vanished and art galleries and cafes appear in their place, and new people start to replace their old neighbors. This is the situation currently unfolding in Bushwick.

On my first visit to Bushwick I got off the L on the Jefferson Street Subway station located in the northwest of the neighborhood. Climbing up and exiting the station I emerged on the corner of Starr Street and Wyckoff Avenue, and it became immediately clear why the neighborhood is currently so widely known for its street art; it is everywhere. Almost every reachable vertical surface was either painted with elaborate murals, or tagged with graffiti or covered with stickers and wheatpaste posters.

It was Sunday around noon, the sky was clear, and the streets were full of people. With no particular plan I started wandering to the direction where most people seemed to be heading. The houses along Wyckoff Avenue vary from large boxy warehouses and other old manufacturing buildings to smaller commercial and residential buildings not more than three stories high. At the time there was not very much new construction prominent in the landscape. On the next block I passed by a juice bar, an old parking lot fenced in with a wall covered in street art, a wine and liquor store, a 'natural health' food store, bars, cafes and a pizzeria.

In the next street corner, in a space that, according to a plaque still hanging on the wall, had a couple of years earlier still been a motor vehicle repair shop was a restaurant that had an outdoors terrace on the street. There was a line of mostly young white people waiting to get a table, and a waiter, a black man, was wearing a black t-shirt with white

text that said “Police don’t shoot I’m a white woman”.

Here Wyckoff Avenue junctions with Troutman Street that has become known as the epicenter of street art in the neighborhood. The story goes that in 2011 a local man, born and raised in Bushwick, wanted to beautify the industrial landscape of his neighborhood. This aspiration led to the founding of The Bushwick Collective, an outdoor street gallery that attracts street artists from all over the world. Collaborating with the owners of the industrial buildings, the street art painted on the walls is not commissioned but permissioned; the artists are not paid in money but in exposure. And there is a lot of that to be gained considering how wildly popular the site has become. Thus, there is a lot of competition for wall space. All the murals curated by the collective are temporary and most new painting occurs around an annual block party. In the past few years the block parties have attracted thousands of people with a combination of street art, music, food trucks and local vendors. There have been graffiti workshops and shows, and performances by famous hip-hop artists.

However, the local communities are not all too pleased about the street art, and especially the block parties, that bring badly behaving outsiders to their neighborhood. In fact, the increased presence of street art is seen to have significantly accelerated gentrification in Bushwick. One person I talked to called the block party “gentrification weekend”. Accordingly, in 2019 a group of local activists organized a protest in the block party by dropping banners from the tops of buildings that surrounded the main stage saying “They want the art, Not the people”, “Artists! Resist becoming weapons of mass displacement” and “Bushwick Collective exploits artists + community”. This discourse of art being used as weapon of gentrification is addressed in the next chapter.

During my fieldwork I ended up visiting Bushwick quite regularly. The neighborhood has a very active collective of artists, activist and community organizers engaged in gentrification resistance. In the following weeks I went to Mayday Festival of Resistance held in Maria Hernandez Park that celebrated and brought together the local community; attended an event held in a local bar that discussed art as resistance and a source of empowerment to the community; and hang out at a local movement space that serves as a hub for the community to organize, educate and build solidarity. The experiences from these situations were in a vast contrast to the experience of my first visit to

Bushwick. Beyond the buzz around the street art displays and Wyckoff Avenue, the neighborhood is still home to predominantly working-class and low-income people of color whose lived realities have recently been disrupted because of gentrification.

4.2 Layers of lived realities

Perceptions of landscape are different depending on who dwell in them and the same landscape contains many different worlds. Considering the historical city planning practices of urban renewal, redlining, benign neglect, planned shrinkage and the neoliberal turn in city government that have disrupted the low-income communities of color in the past decades, they now dwell in completely different landscape than the newcomers to the gentrifying neighborhoods with whom they have come to coexist.

The different landscapes, "the ethnic, the industrial and the gentrified all exist right next to each other, often without 'seeing' each other" (Patch 2004, 181). Very similarly to Latour's idea of opposing opinions existing in completely different worlds, the different groups of people in the same landscape often inhabit completely separate lived realities. Hence, it is easy to sympathize with the community's resentment against the gentrifying landscape in their neighborhoods. Furthermore, gentrification is embedded in the changing landscapes (Patch 2004); it does not create them a new but builds upon the layers of the old and thus appropriates the culture and history in them in the process. In this light, gentrification is a paradoxical process where the existing community is both exploited and brushed aside.

Indeed, the political landscape of gentrification in New York is characterized by antagonisms between different opposing parties, in general the people and the power elite. However, 'the people' is not a homogenous category either. Around the city's neighborhoods there are intangible dividing lines between the people and communities that have been there for a long time, even many generations, and the newcomers, an umbrella term for people now moving into these gentrifying areas. The power elite refers to the city government and its officials, their financial supporters, and corporations, especially real estate, that have established a strong grip over the course along which the city is developed. Furthermore, innumerable non-profit organizations are devoted to advocate for people's right to the city. But these organizations further complicate the equation as

some of them actually work under the city government or are financed by certain corporations that are trying to disguise their actions to appear to be in the service of the community. These 'us' versus 'them' dichotomies are upheld in multiple ways.

Historically, when it still was a heavily industrial area and attracted no outside interest for new development, Williamsburg has not always been a healthy living environment because of waste and toxins that its factories produced and dumped in the community and the East River (Susser 2012). However, the communities that are now being displaced have lived there even then, working in the factories, and sustaining and raising their families. Community and environmental organizations already in the 1970s worked tirelessly to make the neighborhood safer. Ironically, however, "if they had not reduced contamination in the neighborhood, and eliminated the smells and the pervasive lead paint dust from the renovation of the Williamsburg Bridge, the construction of upscale housing might not have been so attractive" (Susser 2012: 44). In deed, "engaged communities are the basis for the sustainability as well as the cultural excitement of the city" (ibid. 59).

I often heard this kind of narrative repeated during my research. People emphasized how the communities in the past had been neglected by the city and had to take care of their homes and neighbors; they would repair each other's houses, watch for each other's kids as mothers were forced to work many jobs, but also wind down together in the evenings sharing food and playing on the streets. These acts of solidarity helped build a strong sense of community, as even the most vulnerable had a safety net to fall back on. This is why gentrification is seen as such a considerable threat: displacing low-income people does not mean they just lose their homes but it separates them from their communities. Furthermore, because landscapes are also a form of remembrance, "tampering with them can equal collective violence" (Berglund et al. 2019: 8).

Indeed, a landscape consists of layers that are not evident to everyone in the same way. Arriving in a foreign place for the first time, one does not really see the whole picture. Only after being immersed, a term used by Ingold (2000), in it for a longer time period, learning the history, understanding the forces that have molded it, and talking to people that have dwelled therein before you, can one start to perceive the landscape more comprehensively. Thus, my perception of the landscapes I have described are inherently

incomplete and do not represent all the stories that they contain. I have no idea how people truly feel in their landscapes or what are all the stories they can read from them that I could not see.

During the weeks I resided in Williamsburg, I would walk around the neighborhood a lot and tried to imagine what it might have looked – and smelled, sounded, felt – like before, in order to try to understand the different lived experiences people have had there. After getting more acquainted with the area, making new friends and hearing stories I started noticing more signs of the viability of the Latino community trying to get recognition regardless of the pressing transformations that have been trying to fade them out. As Patch (2004: 175) has also observed, "ethnic identities are a strong part of the visual landscape" in Williamsburg. On the Southside I would pass by houses that had been decorated with Puerto Rican flags and other cultural items. Some evenings as I was returning home there was a group of elderly people gathered in one street corner next to a school sitting on lawn chairs, playing card and having a nice time with their neighbors.

Almost every morning I would pick up a $1 cup of coffee from a nearby deli that had managed to stay in its street corner since the 1980s. Most mornings I was greeted by the same elderly gentleman who would always answer in Spanish even when spoken to in English that he clearly also knew. Our exchange never progressed beyond "hello, thank you, have a nice day" and whether I wanted milk in my coffee or not, but after only the first week or so he become increasingly warm in his greeting and would make my order without me even asking for it. These encounters, although very brief and mundane, made me feel welcome, and got me thinking about the importance of a steady community and how derailing it must be to lose that.

According to Steven Gregory (1998: 11), "community describes not a static, place-based social collective but the power-laden field of social relations whose meanings, structures, and frontiers are continually produced, contested, and reworked in relation to a complex range of sociopolitical attachments and antagonisms". However, he also analyzes how, for example, neighborhood cleanups have "reworked the racialized economy of space" (p. 127). This is reflected in a story one artist/activist told about his experience of growing up in Bushwick. When he was young Bushwick was riddled with gang

violence and drugs. There were certain areas everyone knew to avoid and gang signs that everyone could read. Local grocers, bodegas, had a vital role as neighborhood watches and they provided for people with drug addiction so that they would not get into more trouble for robbing food and other necessities. Police was not trusted nor did they usually patrol the area unless there was a murder that categorically demanded their involvement. Despite the seeming unrest and disorder, the sense of community in the neighborhood was strong as people took care of each other.

When Bushwick then started to attract outside interest the city stepped in and cleaned up the neighborhood. The community felt betrayed because they had had to live with the fact that the city neglected them, streets were full of potholes and subway platforms plagued with used drug needles. But now these issues were addressed for the benefit of the potential newcomers. In other words, politics of space is tightly connected both to building and sustaining community from within, as well as to how the community is perceived and defined from the outside. Thus, in the unequal power relations that unfold in urban development, the local community often gets brushed aside.

As discussed earlier, the physical landscape of New York City is dictated by the city zoning policies that foster to the neoliberal agenda giving the real estate industry authority over urban development. Without a comprehensive plan that, in addition to building regulation, takes into consideration the future of the urban neighborhoods and communities, the city waives its responsibilities to its citizens and loads the burden of urban justice to the politically aware community organizations. Throughout the 20th century all the way to the present there have been many efforts from activists, community organizations and neighborhood associations to conduct community plans in the hopes that the city would implement them. However, because of complicated bureaucratic processes that take years to complete and shifting political inclinations that take place in the city government, not one community plan has yet been put into practice. The community organizations in Williamsburg, for example, fought hard against Bloomberg's rezoning plans that eventually brought the luxury towers to the waterfront. Their plan had some success but was still rejected in the end (Angotti and Morse 2017; Susser 2012). Thus, the landscapes that are produced appear very different in the eyes of the communities compared to the growth oriented development industry, city officials and

people with higher socioeconomic status.

In conclusion, the newcomers, or gentrifiers, moving into low-income neighborhoods often perceive them very differently than the local residents. Seeing that gentrification in New York has affected especially low-income communities of color, the antagonisms present in the political landscape of gentrification have one often-perpetuated dividing line: race.

4.3 Race matters

> I have witnessed Bushwick become infested with white bodies and white spaces that aesthetically appeal to whiteness. I see white privilege decide the fate of mi communidad.
>
> Anthony Rosado (2015)

As the history of gentrification in New York is that of racist policies targeted especially at low-income communities of color, race and ethnicity are also meaningful layers of the political landscape. Tom Angotti and Sylvia Morse (2017) argue that zoning and housing policy in New York City have protected the segregation of neighborhoods and enabled the displacement of low-income communities of color. However, in order to be successful, all neighborhood transformations need human agents to carry them out. Consequently, especially white newcomers have become to be blamed for gentrification and displacement of low-income people of color, even though their existence in the gentrifying neighborhoods might actually not be the cause but the result of a process far beyond them. But this is not to say that newcomers should think they are off the hook, on the contrary. They are very much the agents, gentrifiers, in the gentrification process, whether they like it of not (see Schlichtman & Patch 2014).

Loretta Lees (2016) argues that literature about gentrification and race to date has maintained a stereotype of just white gentrifiers displacing non-white populations. According to her this is because most of the research on the topic so far has been done in the United States. She criticizes this view because it neglects the fact that non-white gentrification is also on the rise in the US as well as in other parts of the world, especially in non-white societies outside the global north. She also rejects the idea implied in this stereotype that gentrification is "a gentrifier-led process (white gentrifiers on

black locals) as opposed to the bulk of gentrification today that is state-led" (ibid. 208). This criticism complies with the understanding I gained during my stay in Brooklyn. First, gentrification is, in the most radical view, experienced as race and/or class war. Second, gentrifiers are not always, although still mostly, white but sometimes also people of color with higher socioeconomic status.

However, from the perspective of race and ethnicity, gentrification has had a considerable effect on the population trends in Brooklyn. According to an activist in Bushwick only the physical presence of white bodies in a mainly people of color neighborhood is a step towards gentrification because they boom real estate value (Rosado 2016). For example, comparing the Census of 2000 and 2010 the percentage of the Latino population in central census tracts in Williamsburg decreased from roughly 58% to 37%, while the white population increased from 33% to 52%. Accordingly, comparing the American Community Surveys of 2006–2010 and 2014–2018 shows that the monthly median rent in the same area went from $1,371 to $2,384 amounting to an increase of 74%. (NYC Department of City Planning.)

Similarly, in the most rapidly gentrifying census areas in Bushwick the percentage of Latino residents between 2000 and 2010 dropped from roughly 81% to 72%, while the white population grew from 5% to 13%. Furthermore the 2014-2018 American Community Survey shows that the Latino population has continued to shrink to 61%, while whites already make up more than 22% of the population. At the same time the median gross rent in these parts of Bushwick has already increased 22% from $1201 to $1470 a month. (Ibid.) Although the big picture of gentrification goes well beyond statistics and the actions of individuals, there is some indication that as white population has increased the number of people of color has decreased. However, this suggestion only applies to these specific neighborhoods and should not directly be applied elsewhere.

Anthropologist Jesse Mumm (2015) has studied gentrification and race in a Puerto Rican community in Chicago. He argues that gentrification actually produces racism as whites and non-whites live side by side in gentrifying neighborhoods but still inhabit completely separate social worlds, something he calls 'intimate segregation'. Gentrification, then, brings together in a mutual space people from different backgrounds. Problems in this situation usually arise from pre-existing stereotypes, racial biases, and

subjective perceptions of disorder and safety. An from the lack of addressing these issues.

Tying this to the previously discussed different and conflicting lived realities, the presence of white bodies has very real consequences. As noted, one of the main issues of living in separate landscapes within the same neighborhood is that the long-term low-income communities of color and the middle-class, often white, newcomers usually have very opposite views on safety and security. Both groups generally tend to perceive the members of the other group threatening or suspicious. Of course, bringing up white people being scared of and hostile towards people of color in the US is not an original observation as history remembers the horrific ways in which that has manifested. However, the other side of the coin has had far less attention in the public or academic discussions; white people also inflict fear in communities of color.

Differences in the perceptions of disorder and safety are played out in reality through varying actions. Newcomers with higher socioeconomic status, for example, are often accused of calling the police on false pretenses. The situation is fuelled with stereotypes and racial bias. The police is called to check on elderly people of color gathering outside their homes to catch up with neighbors in the afternoon, on music being played too loud through open windows, on groups of black teenagers walking on the streets at night. However, not all situations involve the police; some instances are more implicitly racist. A black artist in an event I participated told a story about an encounter with an acquaintance that had not recognized him when he waved across the street. Wanting to say hello and thinking the other person just had not noticed him, he started walking towards this person who then made a run for it because they thought that an unfamiliar black man was threateningly approaching them. He was stunned and felt offended, then angry.

On the other hand, meeting with adversity can also be seen as forging the community closer together. For example, people circulate narratives of the neighborhood before the transformations and share their memories of growing up, or decorate their front stoops with certain colors and symbols to make the community's presence visible in the changing landscape. Race is often brought up in people's memories in the form of "there were no white people here". However, some might argue that this could lead to an ever in-

creasing dividing line between them and the newcomers.

Because of these antagonisms, antigentrification activists in Brooklyn insist that anyone moving to a new neighborhood after more affordable rents should be very conscious about the effects their decision may have on the pre-existing communities, and make the effort to research who already lives there and what they can do in order to diminish the negative impact they might bring to the community. They are urged to engage with their neighbors and open a dialogue instead of upholding stereotypes. They are also encouraged to favor local small businesses in the area over new businesses that do not contribute to the community.

However, the problem is that not nearly everybody moving to these neighborhoods care enough to make the effort, or even realize that this is an issue. Thus, the discourse of especially white people being ignorant, complacent, and entitled, operating from a space of privilege that often prevents them to see beyond their own reality remains self-fulfilling, and continues to have devastating repercussions for communities of color. As a response the communities have come up with more palpable acts of resistance to gentrification to make themselves seen.

5 Art and resistance in the gentrifying neighborhoods

As already stated, gentrification is a process that works in a myriad of ways. In addition to being enabled and pushed forward by city policies, there are more subtle ways in which it seeps into neighborhoods. Gentrification usually happens after a neighborhood starts to attract outside interest. Art has had a significant role in the processes of drawing attention to places deemed in need of new life (Deutsche & Gendel 1984; Deutsche 1988; Novak 2019). Indeed, as one artist told me, "artists are the earth worms that make things interesting to everyone else, but there can be no artistic excellence without inexpensive live/work spaces". As artists seek affordable spaces to do and show their work, they often come to occupy the areas that have been neglected by the city officials. The creative enclaves that are born create a new air of 'cool' in formerly working-class neighborhoods (Marrero-Guillamón 2016). Soon new people roam the streets and travel magazines tout them as the new hot destination (Zukin 2010).

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Bushwick is one of the neighborhoods in New York that is gentrifying heavily and rapidly due to the art industry. The art scene has had a tendency to shift around after affordable spaces. Bushwick is currently one of the most recent destinations for the migrating creative districts of New York City. According to Sharon Zukin and Laura Braslow (2011) the succession of the districts has moved from Greenwich Village in Manhattan in the 1880s–1920s and 1950s to Soho in the 1960s and 1970s, to East Village in the 1970s and 1980s, then to Williamsburg in the 1990s, and finally to Bushwick in the 2000s. So, Bushwick is a textbook example of the effects that art can have in speeding up gentrification.

The issue here revolves around inclusion and exclusion. When a new gallery comes into a low-income neighborhood, the community members often do not go inside because they feel it is not for them and they are not welcome. The same goes with murals, the current indicator of a cool neighborhood, as they often have no connection to the community they are painted in and with no regard to how the community might feel about them. Recasting a neighborhood this way "as a 'blank canvas' reveals one of public art's effects: the marginalization of existing communities, rendering them invisible in the larger scope of urban gentrification" (Wright & Herman 2018: 90). However, as a

response, there have been numerous occasions where murals have been tagged with graffiti, tags and stickers for being rudely disrespectful. This is also why there is an ever-growing number of community organizations in New York dedicated to community art and taking the artistic privilege into the service of the community.

Street art, from graffiti to contemporary murals, has been an integral part of the urban landscape in New York City since the 1970s. As the city had withdrawn a lot of public funding because of the fiscal crisis, some young people in poor neighborhoods came up with creative new ways to pass the time. Graffiti writing quickly become wildly popular and spread throughout the city as young people strove for fame and respect (Snyder 2009). However, graffiti soon became a political target as mayors John Lindsay and Edward Koch targeted it as urban degeneration and disobedience. Thus, cleaning up the graffiti became a way to for the politicians to take back control (ibid.). But this only meant that, as a protest, the graffiti writers would create more elaborate schemes to get their art seen. Noteworthy in this is that the taking back the city rhetoric has also been repeated in regard to street art in New York.

However, the current street art scene is already quite far removed from the early graffiti writing. Especially the 2010s saw a globally increased public fervor for street art. Once frowned upon as vandalism, suddenly cities around the world started to become famous for their street art scenes. The most glaring difference is that, today, street art is a moneymaking industry and the majority of murals are commissioned. Thus, in a way, the counterculture of graffiti has been turned into something else, domesticated as one activist put it. Yet, this is not to say that graffiti has completely disappeared or that all street art is now commissioned. Graffiti is still written and for various functions, one of which is public social and political critique.

To some extent, artists themselves have been complacent about their role in gentrification. In the maelstrom of subsistence in the city, some have to prioritize their livelihood over the solidarity to their surrounding community. However, there are also artists that have employed their practice into resistance.

5.1 Artists and artivism

Artists are often singled out as being among the first newcomers into a gentrifying area, taking advantage of empty, cheap spaces and opening art galleries that seem worlds apart from the communities they come to inhabit (Deutsche & Gendel 1984; Novak 2019). Especially the role of art galleries as 'art-washing' neighborhoods – making them suddenly exciting to outsiders and thus attracting more newcomers and even tourists – is particularly problematic. However, even as on one hand artists are helping gentrification happen, on the other hand, socially aware artists are among the most influential actors in resisting it. This 'artivism' takes many forms.

In order to explain why art has such a central role in the analysis of gentrification in this thesis, I will recapitulate a panel discussion with artists and community organizers that addressed the problem of art being co-opted as a weapon to gentrify low-income neighborhoods across New York City.

For three months in the fall of 2016, *Artists Space*, a nonprofit gallery and art scene pioneer in Soho, was converted into action-oriented community space and a shared resource of art and organizing by a project called *Decolonize This Place* that among other issues targeted de-gentrification. A panel discussion labeled "Artists: ~~In the Business of Gentrification~~ NYC is Not for Sale" (Artists Space 2016; part crossed-out on the original poster for the event) was held as a part of the project in October that year. The panel consisted of artists and organizers from various grassroots social movements across the city from the Bronx, Bushwick, and Ridgewood in Queens, and the event was meant for local residents, artists and other organizers.

In the discussion gentrification and the ways in which it is carried out were looked at from many different angles. The main message of the event seemed to be how both sides of the conflict employ art for their own purposes. For example, street art that today is seen as something cool and beautiful, thus making contemporary urban spaces more interesting as well, is in reality used as a vehicle for far-reaching social injustice. First of all, the murals need to have permission to be made and not to be seen merely as vandalism, and this permission is naturally subject to the owner of the building or other vacant space in question. Although it might seem like a noble thing to offer space for

artists to display their work, the corporations behind the buildings have hidden agendas. They know that art creates interest and attracts new kinds of people to these areas, and by offering these spaces for artists they are actually using them as gentrifiers (see Schacter 2014). This is precisely what has now happened in Bushwick.

Also art galleries rose up in the discussion as a topic of concern. For example, according to one member of the audience, in Chinatown property owners can now be asking up to $25,000 per month for a store front gallery space, which in turn has enabled them to also raise the building's residential rents already up to $9000 for a two-bedroom apartment. This is devastating in a neighborhood where the monthly median income of a family of four is about $3500. The discussion, then, was also about raising awareness within the artists and galleries on these issues, and an invitation for them to seek more altruistic ways for practicing their art instead of naively just going after the cheapest possible spaces.

Accordingly, the panelists talked a lot about housing that is one of the key issues in gentrification. They shared stories of tenant associations fighting predatory practices; because housing is a commodity, people are forced to live in terrible conditions as landlords try to minimize costs. They highlighted how renters are especially vulnerable to gentrification and how working-class homeowners are harassed out of their homes that are then resold for a lot more money. Thus, they discussed the need to democratize development in the city, and one of the panelists was organizing for a new people's housing plan.

Another panelist brought up how new residents in working-class neighborhoods change also the composition of local governments and community boards, which has an affect on representation. Also, environmental impact studies, that are part of rezoning plans, are done by the developers and the city, not the community that would be acutely aware of the issues a growing population might bring to their neighborhood's infrastructure.

It was then brought up that, even though fighting legislation is important, showing up for the community and spreading information there is paramount. Furthermore, the importance of building solidarity was a key message; if marginalized people do not come together they are going to be divided and conquered. They advocated for solidarity be-

tween different boroughs across the city because connecting leads to collaborating. They highlighted how it is up to native New Yorkers to do good for the community because people (politicians, developers, newcomers, tourists) love New York, but not New Yorkers.

There was a consensus that newcomers have the choice to move to a different area and that is not going to devastate their lives; the working-class communities are not in the same position. As to why the panelists think so many artists looking for cheap gallery spaces do not seem to care about how their actions impact the surrounding community, the answer was: to look is to know, and to know is to have a moral imperative to do something. It is easier to choose to be ignorant. However, art-washing is real and the panelists agreed that it should be made deplorable for artists to work with developers, and this might be the only way to get them to do things differently.

Many different stories of gentrification resistance were shared: some had protested, some organized tenants, others made art. But more subtle acts of resistance were also circulated. These included counter narratives to the official urban development jargon that highlights the inevitability of gentrification. In other words, the community coming together and sharing experiences is also an act of resistance.

It was also emphasized that all current antigentrification action needs to build on the perspective that New York is built on Lenape land and these indigenous people were the first to be displaced. Also, to fight gentrification one needs to be for police abolition too. Accordingly, in the spirit of decolonization larger political issues were tied to gentrification; it has resulted from capitalism that is hinged on white supremacy. Thus, gentrification whitewashes neighborhoods and kills culture, which is why some of the organizers on the panel do not go to Williamsburg anymore; it has become too white.

At the end of the event there was a call for direct action on social media. People were given pamphlets and stickers they were asked to spread around the city and post their pictures of these actions on social media using hashtags that reference to the causes and organizations present at the event.

During my fieldwork I participated in many similar events that in some way brought art to the forefront of resistance. All these events brought organizations, artists and com-

munity members together to talk about what art can do for the communities. In other words, the events assembled together certain people with shared interests around a particular set of issues thus forming 'spaces of dissent' (Marrero-Guillamón 2016), a notion that will be elaborated in more detail later in this chapter. In these spaces they addressed how the communities in low-income neighborhoods are silenced in the development decisions of the city and what alternatives there might be.

I also managed to get an inside glimpse of the life on the artists' side of this debate. For the duration of my fieldwork I lived with an artist commune in a live/work space built in an old garage structure in Williamsburg. At the time of my stay my hosts had called the space home for already 21 years. The other residents were musicians, dancers and artists on various fields. In total, there were nine of us living there, and everyday the space was also occupied by the members of their art ensemble and a couple of their employees. And as it happens, for a couple of years now, this little community has also been fighting against being displaced from their home. However, their situation is a little bit different because their future in their home depends on technicalities within the law that regulates which kinds of spaces qualify for the status of a loft and thus eligible to be considered as habitable. Also, their fight against gentrification revolves mainly around artists struggle to stay put in their live/work spaces, not the whole surrounding community.

In solidarity to their fight I participated in a rally they helped organize for better loft law held in a church that was converted into a meeting space covered with posters and filled with chants and music from beating drums. The art ensemble was dressed for the occasion, some as windows, symbolizing the technicality for which their home is at risk, and one as a giant ear that highlighted that their cause should be heard. Along with my hosts and dozens of other people they had recruited to join them, and bearing a window made from paint and cardboard around my neck, I also participated in New York City Loft Board's meeting where their case was being discussed and voted on. The presence of such a large crowd with such peculiar attires at the meeting worked as a disruption, and the hearing of their case was postponed giving them some leeway to hone their arguments. To this date they are still fighting for their home.

The above is an example of how powerful art can be in direct action. Also in direct

antigentrification activism banners painted with phrases and other visuals are integral to making an effective statement. For example, the guerilla protest at the Bushwick Collective block party discussed earlier was a potent testimonial of the community's disproval of such gentrifying event. As one artist/organizer put it, "without visuals, you never existed".

5.2 Two community art projects

I will now describe and analyze the works of two art projects in Williamsburg and Bushwick and their significance to the community. These examples illustrate, quite literally, how the communities experience gentrification as a threat to their homes, and also criticize how gentrification commodifies the culture of the communities. As Blok and Farías (2016) have pointed out, an analysis of art objects should take into account the specific kinds of spaces they create and where they circulate. Tying this to the anthropological idea of landscape as an actively lived world wherein people dwell, a visual act of resistance in the gentrifying landscape becomes a source of empowerment to the community.

One of these projects creates murals of the community for the community in Williamsburg's Los Sures. Tim Sieber, Graça Índias Cordeiro and Lígia Ferro (2012) have argued that community murals often depict themes of resistance against the state, or the elite, and thus aim to (re)appropriate public space. Thus, murals offer "grassroots representations of local identities, neighborhood history, evolving ethnic and generational relationships, and the trajectory of development and change", and are "powerful tools in building neighborhood solidarity across ethnic groups, --- and feature the strong cultural leadership role of youth in building community and in envisioning a hopeful future for residents" (Sieber et al. 2012: 264).

The other project has built small light signs with big messages that have been hung in front of people's houses and in the windows of small businesses in gentrifying neighborhoods. These signs have created a disruption both in urban spaces under new development, but with their modest aesthetics also to the street art frenzy.

¡Cultura con Azúcar!

Soon after arriving to Williamsburg, I stumbled upon a large mural painted on a plywood wall separating the street and a construction site right next to my temporary home. As mentioned in the discussion about the landscape in Williamsburg, it is not at all uncommon to find a mural or smaller pieces of street art, as well as graffiti, in this part of the city, as they are everywhere. However, during the following days and weeks I discovered a couple of other murals that seemed to have very similar style as this one. A quick search online revealed that they were indeed made by the same collective called *Los Muralistas de El Puente*. El Puente is a community human rights institution found in 1982 when the neighborhood was still mainly a Latino community with predominantly Puerto Rican residents, and riddled with teenage gang violence. Its mission is to inspire and nurture leadership for peace and justice through engaging youth and adults in the arts, education, scientific research, health and environmental action. Los Muralistas is part of El Puente Arts program and for two decades they have illustrated the challenges, victories, hopes and dreams of the Los Sures community through their public artworks.

I got a chance to have a walking tour around Williamsburg in the different locations of the murals with one of the leading artists for Los Muralistas, Matt, and an El Puente Academy teacher, Charlie. The topics of the murals reflect what is going on in the community. Matt noted that as long as the murals are rooted in the community, there are virtually no restrictions on what can be painted. One of the murals, *Ashes to Ashes* painted in 2000 on a wall of a small store, depicts the dangers of smoking and criticizes how the tobacco industry in the United States has been targeting especially young people in communities of color. Another one, *NurtureNature* done in 2012, is painted on the outside walls of an elementary school whose principal is from the Southside, and it addresses issues around the environment, education and sustainability. As the school is located in an intensely heterogeneous neighborhood they wanted the mural to help bridge the gap between the Latino community and the newcomers.

One of the biggest murals in Williamsburg, *The Pride of the Southside* painted in 2016 on the wall of I middle school, depicts the many stages of Williamsburg's history from agrarian land to town establishment, and from an industrial nucleus of the nation to to-

day's gentrification. The mural also reflects the waves of different ethnic groups who have called the Southside home, by which the artists wanted to emphasize the collective humanity that connect all people. As it turned out, this was the huge mural I first came across as I had just arrived to Williamsburg and hauled my luggage through the Southside.

Image 1. *¡Cultura con Azucar!* mural on the wall of a development site. (Photo/Nette Holopainen)

The most interesting of all these murals, however, was *¡Cultura con Azúcar!* painted in 2014 and located next to my Williamsburg home. This mural pulls apart what gentrification has done to the Los Sures community. In total the wall on which the mural was painted was about 25 meters long and fenced off the site where Domino Sugar Refinery used to stand. The factory was built in 1856 and mostly demolished in 2014. At one point it had been the largest sugar refinery in the world. Consequently, the factory was a major employer in the community in its time. Charlie told how growing up he remembers how the whole neighborhood was filled with a delicious sweet smell on hot summer afternoons as the workers were returning home and socializing with their families and neighbors over beers and games of domino outside their houses.

The mural depicts the rich history of the Southside and cultural values of the Latino community. For the mural, the members of the project collected oral histories from their community and included them in the mural as texts. Hence, the finished mural is very

explicit in what it wants to say with written quotes from people. Because the mural involves direct references to the community, it is not just beautiful, but leaves less room for interpretation. However, the cultural imagery might be explicitly meaningful for the community but not necessarily available to the larger public. Thus, the mural makes the community and its values visible in the gentrifying landscape. The quotes reflect the fact that there still is a thriving community of people who have deep roots in the neighborhood that is now heavily gentrified:

> To me the mural represents the community. The people that live here, what they do, and what the community is about.
>
> People that lived here for a long time stayed here. They weren't afraid to put up a fight and protect what was theirs.

Among the quotes one can also find a sense of hope and resilience:

> My dream for Los Sures is that we start waking up and empowering ourselves to do better and hold on to whatever little bit we have.

Implicitly present is also a sense of pride:

> I miss my sugar house. I'm glad I was part of history working in the factory.

The quotes also imply how important memories are for the sense of belonging and community:

> I feel most welcome in Los Sures when I see people in front of their homes.

The importance of community is reflected also in the individual illustrations within the mural. There are pictures of *vejigante*, a Puerto Rican festival character that symbolizes resistance to colonialism and imperialism, feeding Puerto Rican cultural items from a bowl that says "take" with a big spoon to a figure of a consumer who has "blinded by all my stuff" written on his glasses. There are depictions of women having their permanents done in a beauty salon; of kids having fun with broken fire hydrants that shower water on the streets; of people sitting outside on their stoop; of men playing *palitos*, a Puerto Rican musical instrument. There are pictures of small houses that have grocery stores on the ground level, and of city landscapes with skyscrapers, traffic jams, and

billboards that say “House the Poor”.

At the time of my fieldwork the mural was already partly taken apart as an access to the construction site had been run through the wall. The portion that had been taken down was probably the most controversial part of the mural. It had depicted images of sugar cane cultivation, and a raised brown fist with broken shackles around the wrist and the words “conoce tu historia para que no la repitas”, or freely translated, know your history so that you do not repeat it, running across the arm. These images referred to Puerto Rico’s history of being colonized and having large sugar plantations, tying the Los Sures community to a greater historical and political context. The mural thus addresses both the significance of the Domino Sugar factory in the neighborhood as well as the impact of sugar trade on the Puerto Rican community.

As a whole, the mural traces the history of Puerto Ricans being first colonized by Spain and later invaded by the United States that seized the economic opportunities that the island’s agricultural production offered. After dominating the sugar trade the US recruited Puerto Ricans to its army forces and as workers, which is still reflected in their large numbers in New York. A large community of Puerto Rican immigrants made the city their home and took pride in their culture and neighborhoods (see Susser 2012; Zukin 2010). Now, their culture is commodified and neighborhoods transformed almost unrecognizable. Thus, the mural is a powerful critique to the colonization process to which gentrification is also equated.

According to Matt and Charlie, the mural also serves as critique to the current trend of street artists usually having no connection to or consideration over the surrounding communities where their art is located. However, it has also been criticized precisely because of its location. In fact, it had been commissioned by Two Trees real estate development company that is currently redeveloping the former Domino site into a massive luxury-housing complex. Matt told how they had originally been unsure if they should accept Two Trees’ money and work with them. One point of concern was censorship; would they be allowed to paint whatever they wished. They were finally assured of not being censored and thus the mural ended up becoming open criticism on Two Trees and gentrification. However, although the mural was made on the community’s terms, this is also an example of how the real estate industry exploits artists for

their own ends. Indeed, Sieber et al. (2012: 265) have pointed out that because most murals are usually funded, even "local mural movements that originally begin as popular, grass-roots expressions, can be co-opted and redirected for purposes of tourism marketing", which has happened in Williamsburg and is currently evident in Bushwick too.

Mi Casa No Es Su Casa

My other example of how art empowers the community comes from a political multimedia art project *Mi Casa No Es Su Casa*, a Brooklyn Antigentrification Network member organization based in Bushwick. The objective of the project has been to build visible resistance to gentrification and displacement by, literally, shedding light on the issue, and building consciousness within the community. The goal is pursued by installing light signs outside of homes and local small businesses in the increasingly gentrifying neighborhood. Visually the signs are quite simple: black boards, no more than a meter wide, with small Christmas light like bulbs drilled through them. However, they are intentionally very controversial stating, for example, that "Gentrification is the New Colonialism", "Decolonize the Hood" and "Gentrification in Process".

Image 2. "NOT 4 SALE" sign on a residential building in Bushwick. (Photo/Nette Holopainen)

The founder of the project was one of the panelists in the "Artists: ~~In the Business of Gentrification~~ NYC is Not for Sale" event. According to her, the motivation behind the

project was for the community to take art back. She explains how Bushwick, where she has lived all her life, has suddenly become a place to be for all artists, and although the art and the murals that today dominate the landscape in many parts of the neighborhood might be beautiful, they are actually used for displacing the working-class people of color that live there.

She told that her family keeps receiving letters from real estate developers asking to buy their home. Originally she had thought of using the letters in her art project by making a collage of the letters and pamphlets outside her house that would say "fuck you". She is, however, pleased that the project was finally realized in the form of the light signs, because their power is making visible not only the resistance against gentrification but also solidarity within and among different neighborhoods and boroughs. They want to have the signs in strategic places, outside of on-going developments and real-estate agencies, which is why getting people involved in the project and lighting up the signs outside their homes is important. She also noted that people always say how they love New York but not New Yorkers, which is why it is important to make art by New Yorkers for New Yorkers, and not by outsiders to outsiders as has been happening in Bushwick.

For both of these art projects, then, visibility enables visibility; making resistance to gentrification visible through art allows the struggles of the community to become visible too, which can then empower people to take part in action. However, even if the art is intended to stir emotions, bring up memories and empower the community, in the revolving chaos of urban life, to some extent it will probably be reduced to the background over time. As Latour also notes, "objects appear associable with one another and with social ties only momentarily" and "the greater their importance, the faster they disappear" (2005, 80). Latour explains this by how objects can appear as interruptions to the normal course of action, but in these encounters they disappear again when they become part of the new normal.

In a way then, while community art might maintain at least some of its meaning and relevance for the community itself, it easily looses its importance within the wider audience that does not know explicitly what the art portrays and what it is trying to say. However, networks comprised of art, artists, activists and the community form an im-

pression of a sense of solidarity and belonging, that empowers the community in the face of neglect and inequality. So, even if it may be argued that "art has meaning only within a social environment" (Campbell 2001, 118), maybe what is important is to acknowledge that unless you are part of the community whose struggles the artworks highlight, you might never fully grasp the importance of the art. After all, objects, and thus art, are made of multiple layers (Ingold 2000; Latour 2005; Marrero-Guillamón 2017; Pilo' & Jaffe 2020).

Circling back to my point of not wanting to consider the formal definitions of art, I would conclude that in this context it would be indeed irrelevant; art takes a lot of different forms. One of the organizers I spoke to, for example, talked about how in Downtown Brooklyn, "back in the day when it still was all black and Caribbean people", stairs in front of the houses were painted with the Pan-African colors red, black and green as signaling the unity of the community. Likewise, the Puerto Rican flags and other cultural items that decorate the murals and some houses in Los Sures represent pride for their community. So, as long as an artistic expression resonates with the community, empowers the people, and makes them feel like they belong somewhere, art has done something and made a difference (Latour 2005). However, art can also serve as critique to prevailing social and political orders by questioning the 'common' and creating disruptions in the urban landscape.

5.3 Spaces of dissent

Anthropologist Isaac Marrero-Guillamón has done research on resistance to urban renewal in Poblenou, Barcelona, and on critical artistic practices in Hackney Wick, East London at the time of the London Olympics 2012 that resulted in massive transformations to the area. The story of Hackney Wick outlined by Marrero-Guillamón (2016) is strikingly similar to that of Williamsburg and Bushwick. Once an industrial center the area has been deflated starting from 1960s as the large industries started to move away or closed. In 1980s artists who were priced out of nearing areas and looking for affordable live/work spaces started occupying the decaying buildings. At the turn of the millennium some of the old industrial buildings were converted into lofts attracting an entirely new demography to the area.

This “amalgam of spaces and people”, Marrero-Guillamón (2016: 123) notes, gave Hackney Wick its “distinctive post-industrial feel – rather quiet, home to a variety of unregulated practices (such as informal markets, street occupations, raves), and marked by the juxtaposition of young artists, older residents and workers, and occasional yuppies”. ‘The Wick’ before the Olympics was ‘cool’ with its underground art and music scenes, and “certain hype was built around the area, which manifested itself in the existence of an increasing number of restaurants, cafes, bars, galleries, and mixed-use venues” (ibid. 124). As the construction of the Olympic site started in 2007 a large plot of land had been compulsory purchased resulting in displacement of hundreds of businesses, and thousands of residents and jobs. The site was fenced off and heavily policed until the reopening of the site as Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in 2013. There had been little interest for development in Hackney Wick before the Olympics, but after them “the area was deemed ripe for re-development” (ibid. 127).

Marrero-Guillamón traces the role of art in creating spaces of dissent (or antagonism) towards the Olympic mega-event and the impact it had on the surrounding area by discussing three artistic projects that took place in Hackney Wick during 2011–2013. He theorizes these projects as practices of assembling that created “distinct cosmopolitical forums” (ibid. 127); these kinds of spaces emerge around certain issues, gather certain publics, produce a certain kind of ‘common’, and are characterized by dissensus.

The term dissensus is borrowed from Jacques Rancière, as it emphasizes the idea of politics as disruption, “the unmaking of a particular ‘given’”, in other words, “the dismantling of the prevailing articulation of the common” (Marrero-Guillamón 2016: 128). Precisely the building of a common world and escaping from it as a political process creates the foundation why Marrero-Guillamón finds Rancière useful in relation to the cosmopolitical proposal.

Thus, Marrero-Guillamón’s ethnographic examples highlight “the uses of art to produce spaces of dissent around the Olympic Games” (ibid. 129). Artist Jim Woodall’s *Olympic State*, a 3x3m CCTV counter-surveillance hut with cameras, monitors and other recording devices, was first built on a rooftop of a live/work space in Hackney Wick. It served as a critique to the heavily policed Olympic site across the canal. After two weeks of living in the hut “in a permanent state of vigilance”, Woodall had relocated it

to a nearby gallery, a context that had transformed *Olympic State* into "a *monument* to the original performance" (ibid. 129; original emphasis). Aware and concerned with this Woodall wanted to activate the hut again and thus restore some of its original performativity, which resulted in an event called *24-h Olympic State*. Drawing together artists, curators, photographers, performers, researchers and architects, Marrero-Guillamón depicts the 24-hour marathon event as a specific form of assembly that came together around two main issues: "the activation of local history 'from below', and critical engagement with the politics and aesthetics of surveillance" (ibid. 130), both of which also appealed to the public. The event took on distinctive qualities creating "an interesting fluidity between different modes of being together" (ibid. 130) as the audience would alternately sit in silence watching films, performances and presentations, and then engage in public discussions.

The various forms, methods and mediums present at the event provided a means to remember and reimagine (Marrero-Guillamón 2016: 131):

> Against the systematic effacement of local history that the Olympic development had relied on, with the official documents and surveys defining the area as contaminated wastelands in desperate need of cleansing and regeneration, these [art] projects articulated an alternative narrative that spoke of the freedom of interstitial spaces, subterranean social practices, and unregulated plant and animal life. Collective memory became an instrument for radical reimagination. This was remembering as a form of (soft) revenge; far from a sentimental retreat to the past, it was about not allowing things to be forgotten.

24-h Olympic State, then, produced "a space and a time for dissenting with the Olympics in a context where most cultural institutions, mainstream media, local councils, and even universities generally avoided engaging critically with it" (ibid. 132). In this way, "a temporary collective gathered to share and experience an alternative account of the area's history and transformation, and challenge the hegemonic discourse through a proliferation of new voices and subjectivities" (ibid. 132). According to Marrero-Guillamón the event opened up a political space through its aesthetic specificity as it enabled certain words and images to be heard and seen, and a particular public to assemble.

For Marrero-Guillamón, the cosmopolitical perspective on urban politics expands the

idea of what matters politically, and steers focus on process and uncertainty; "Cosmopolitics has at its core the question of the articulation of the common world, which is addressed, in a pragmatic fashion, as a constituent process involving the emergence of issues and their publics and a range of materials and mediations" (ibid. 127).

Similarly to Marrero-Guillamón, borrowing Lefebvre's notion of 'counter-space' Maurice Rafael Magaña (2016) examines how social movements in Oaxaca have altered the sociopolitical landscape of the city. The counter-spaces are defined "as spatial projects produced through the political imagination and practice of social movements as an alternative to the spaces created by the dominant system" (Magaña 2016: 218), and as "a continual process of contestation that is never complete" (ibid. 219). In this way counter-spaces seek to reclaim the right to public space. Counter-spaces can take many forms that include " political and social centers, popular education spaces, urban farms and food cooperatives, alternative media collectives, graffiti/street art collectives and the public art they produce" (ibid. 231).

Thus, resistance art does not have to be elaborate or a big project, and graffiti, for example, has for a long time been a form of instant feedback (Snyder 2009). In the same spirit in recent years #FreeBushwick tags written with black or white marker have appeared in public spaces in the neighborhood and inside the cars of the L train, sometimes elaborated with notes such as "Gentrification is NeoColonialism and whitewashing". These tags take little effort to make but are located in very visible places and thus have potential for signaling resistance by creating spaces of dissent, or counter-spaces, in the public landscape.

Thinking through the terms of dissent and countering, the art events and projects described in this chapter can also be considered as practices of assembling distinct cosmopolitical forums around creating solidarity, empowering the community, and critical engagement with the politics of gentrification. For example, articulating the alternative narratives of neighborhood change and displacement allows the often-traumatic experiences of the community not to be forgotten (Marrero-Guillamón 2016). When art is done by and for the community it does not conform to outside rules or the dominant system, which alters the sociopolitical landscape in the gentrifying neighborhoods, and (re)claims the city for the people.

6 “Whose city? Our city!”

The previous chapters have discussed the layered landscapes of the city. They have analyzed how people live in different worlds, but come together over shared interests and in doing so are empowered by their communities. Behind the issues of resistance, urban politics and activism lie broader societal questions of race, class and power structures.

When considering the city as existing in multiple and overlapping ways, the construction and enactment of realities are political processes because the versions of the city that the city and the real estate market produce are very different than those produced by the people (Blok & Farías 2016). In this equation power relations become revealed in representation: who is included and who excluded, what is made present and what absent. Cosmopolitics then is about conflict and compromise (Stengers 2005).

The current political climate in the United States is heated to say the least. People are fed up and angry about systemic oppression, failed promises and increasing austerity measures, and the country is perhaps more divided it has been in decades[3]. Activists on many fronts are challenging the social order that is based on economic growth (see Berglund 2019b). Thus, understanding and acknowledging the significance of complex transformations of every day life might be the key to solve the problems the society is facing.

As gentrification in public discourse is often related to upgrading, regeneration or even renaissance of rundown urban areas, some consider it a positive thing. In the history of the term there have been many occasions when it has been heavily contested, so much

[3] At the time of writing this in the early summer of 2020, the world is in the middle of a pandemic. In the US the novel corona virus has disproportionately affected especially black communities across the country. On top of months of grappling with the global health crisis that put the country in a lockdown, a police officer killed George Floyd, an unarmed black man during an arrest on the street in Minneapolis on May 25. What followed was a somewhat unpresedented uprising against systemic racism and police brutality that spread to hundreds of cities in America, and across the world. Three weeks in, the demonstrations show no signs of dwindling.

so that even “the most prestigious advertising space in the New York Times was purchased by the city’s developers, who felt obliged to defend their gentrification of the city” (Smith 1996: 32). The language of progress remains and keeps reinforcing the widespread assumption among real estate developers that the neighborhoods affected by gentrification are culturally deprived prior to it, and they should thus make things better.

However, this could often not be further from the lived reality of the people who have made their lives in these neighborhoods; for them they are their whole life worlds with strong cultural and social ties. Thus, neighborhood transformation is personal and palpable. It is easy to argue that areas that have faced disinvestment in the past decades are made better and safer for everyone through gentrification but this is not the way this ‘progress’ is experienced by the local communities. What really follows is displacement as city development pushes communities apart, and people not being able to identify with the changed landscape (see Berglund et al. 2019).

Since gentrification disproportionately affects particularly low-income communities of color, anti-gentrification activism has sometimes been contested as promoting segregation; if the activists are against new investments and people coming into the neighborhoods and disrupting the community, does this not mean that they want to keep the areas segregated. This, however, is too a simple a line of thought and definitely not the reasoning behind their actions. Instead, the struggle is about unequal power relations and the community’s right to their city and their own lives.

In today’s world “the rights of private property and the profit rate trump all other notions of rights” (Harvey 2009: 315). Neoliberalism has “created new systems of governance that integrate state and corporate interests, and through the application of money power, it has ensured that the disbursement of the surplus through the state apparatus favors corporate capital and the upper classes in shaping the urban process” (Harvey 2009: 329). Billionaires, like Michael Bloomberg in New York, are elected as mayors. This has reshaped “the city along lines favorable to developers, Wall Street, and transnational capitalist-class elements and promoting the city as an optimal location for high-value businesses and a fantastic destination for tourists” (ibid. 329). When money reigns, the right to the city is “restricted in most cases to a small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more after their own de-

sires" (ibid. 329). Thus, when people fight for their the right to the city, it is more than about "individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city", and "a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization" (Harvey 2009: 315).

Harvey (2009: 329) concludes that the right to the city should be adopted as working slogan as well as political ideal: "The democratization of that right, and the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will, is imperative if the dispossessed are to take back the control that they have for so long been denied, and if they are to institute new modes of urbanization." This has been precisely the aim of the anti-gentrification activists I encountered.

As Mayer (2017: 2) has put it, "when today's urban movements raise the question 'whose city?', they don't inquire into the ways and means with which the obvious owners reproduce their ownership, but they demand – in challenging this appropriation – that the city should belong to those who inhabit it". Today, "urban social movements have turned the question 'whose city?' into a battle cry for reappropriating what 'the one percent' is increasingly denying the '99 percent': the 'right to the city', which stands not only for the right to 'the city we want' but also for the right to representation and recognition of all who are being disenfranchised and dispossessed by the process of (extended) neoliberal urbanization" (Mayer 2016: 14).

Merrifield (2013: 12–13) has questioned Harvey's view of the city playing a key role in the struggles against neoliberalism – what is so special about cities as the whole world has urbanized:

> Maybe the right to the city isn't the *right* right that needs articulating? Saying this in no way denies the role of people fighting to maintain affordable rents in cities, to keep their neighborhoods mixed and relatively democratic, and to ensure that public spaces stay open and that gentrification doesn't displace all but the superwealthy. But what it does mean is that to bundle these multiple struggles together, and then to file them under the rubric " RTTC ," is to render them as somehow vacuously abstract, suggesting far too vast a political understanding and far too narrow an existential need. It's too vast because the scale of the city is out of reach for most people living at street level; it's too narrow

> because when people do protest, when they do take to the streets en masse, their existential desires frequently reach out beyond the scale of the city itself and revolve around a common and collective humanity, a pure democratic yearning.

Indeed, in recent years the right to the city discussion has been reframed; maybe what is more accurately at stake is the right to stay put (Lees et al. 2018), or more importantly the right to community (Hubbard & Lees 2018). Community is a safety net that has historically been vital for survival especially in disenfranchised neighborhoods, thus it continues to be centered in anti-gentrification activism.

6.1 Anti-gentrification activism

Changing neighborhoods have for a long time stirred emotions in New York. For example, in a widely reported incident in 1988, Manhattan's East Village saw a riot against repurposing the city's public spaces when homeless people were to be banned from sleeping in Tompkins Square Park (Smith 1996; Zukin 2010). Already then the protesters waived banners that read, "Gentrification is class war! Fight back" and "Stop the fight on the poor! Gentrification is genocide". The police had a big role in how the riot unfolded into a violent assault on the demonstrators. However, from the 121 reported cases of police brutality that night, no one was ever convicted (Smith 1996). This tells a harsh story about how the authorities in the United States deal with such clashes with the public; the blame is put on the victim. Because of this, anti-gentrification activism includes fight against police brutality still today.

Smith (1996: 8) has described antigentrification movements in the 1990s as militant and on the forefront of the new urban frontier that "mixes spectacular opportunity for real estate investors with an edge of daily danger on the street". He sees the new frontier as a part of urban neoliberalism that is characterized by privatization of public space and almost total disregard of the poor, the homeless and communities of color. Although all acts of resistance to gentrification might not be militant, the metaphor of a frontier still holds significance as resistance is still talked about in the terms of battles and war.

During my fieldwork I got involved with *Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network* (BAN) that proved to be a very fruitful source of contacts, ideas and information. BAN was

initiated in 2015 by a community organization *Equality for Flatbush*, and as of December 2017 the network consisted of around fifteen core grassroots organizations from all over Brooklyn. According to the network's website, BAN "is a people of color-led mass-based coalition of tenants, homeowners, block associations, anti-police brutality groups, legal and grassroots organizations working together to end the rampant gentrification and displacement of low to middle income residents of Brooklyn, New York" (The Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network, 2015a). The statement is very explicit about the network's position and the varied groups that are, together, involved in a common struggle.

The network is also very clear on what they think about the way the city is currently run. They are organized against the premise that (The Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network, 2015b):

> The real estate corporations, big business elite, and the New York City political machine have banded together to build luxury housing, promote the police occupation of our neighborhoods, and destroy the cultural, social, and economic diversity of our communities all in the name of making a profit. The time is Now! for Brooklyn residents and groups to create a grassroots movement and campaign to prevent the displacement of low-to-middle income people, elders, families and mom-and-pop businesses from Brooklyn.

This statement implies all the ways in which gentrification has a negative impact on the communities; families are torn apart, racial stereotypes decrease the feeling safety within people of color as the presence police increases, and small businesses that have sustained the community disappear.

The notable connection between the riot in East Village thirty years ago and the activism today is that gentrification is seen as an attack towards the communities and people's right to the city. Indeed, "Whose City? Our City!" and "Brooklyn Is Not For Sale!" are among many occurring catchphrases that BAN often uses in their organizing and activism. As it is the 21st century, a big part of BAN's organizing and activism happens online, and hashtags like #TakeBackOurCommunities and #BANGentrification are circulated through social media platforms. However, as one organizer pointed out, it is important to acknowledge the difference between activism in reality and activism in

social media because people have to make sacrifices to do the work and only posting on social media, without engaging in direct action, is not sufficient to make any difference.

A lead organizer for Equality for Flatbush and BAN explained to me how gentrification in New York is in big part about housing. Furthermore, according to him one of the most important aspects of antigentrification activism is to fight for rent stabilization, or rent control, because in New York City people cannot buy houses of their own as there are too few to buy and consequently people cannot afford them. Indeed, over two thirds of New Yorkers are renters. And in some parts of Brooklyn the percentage is at well over 90% (NYC Department of City Planning). Thereby, rent stabilization law is important because it allows apartments to be passed down within families and thus these apartments become "your home until you die". However, nowadays most of the people living in New York do not have rent stabilizing anymore and are forced pay into market-rate rents.

The organizer went on to explain how communities in Brooklyn since the 1960s and '70s, after the white flight into the suburbs, were built by the people of color. They came to the neighborhoods that at the time were deemed undesirable, built their lives there, held their landlords accountable, cleaned up their block, built community gardens and churches, and looked after their community. And these people and their descendants are now the ones that are being pushed out and displaced. Because of this legacy, BAN is led by people of color even today.

Holding the landlords accountable is still one of the core actions BAN organizes. Everyday at least a couple of calls for action against tenant harassment are issued though their community organizing email list and social media outlets. These have included raising money for a member of the community who has not been able to meet their rent and is now threatened with eviction, or circulating images of rundown apartments with pests and physical damage to create awareness of yet an other "predatory landlord", as well as calls to "pack the court" in order to make it visible that a disenfranchised member of the community has the support of the community in a case of legal action taken against them.

Another very significant part of BAN's activism is intervening in local politics. There is a shared understanding that city policies are systematically driving gentrification by forcing affordable neighborhoods to become unaffordable under the disguise of cleaning up the streets and providing more services. The Mayor and his office, the Department of City Planning, the borough presidents and local council members are constantly under scrutiny when they are perceived to play for the opposite team and not for the benefit of the communities. What is changing today is that, as a participant in a BAN general meeting pointed out, "politicians are not used to black communities fighting back, but rolling over" and surrendering to the external forces. Now these politicians are "given hell". This is a remarkable turn because, as this organizer states, there is not one black community in New York that has not been targeted by gentrification.

A gentrifying area typically sees an increase in the presence of police roaming the streets. This, however, does not amount to an increased feeling of safety, but contrarily, it unfortunately means heightened feelings of insecurity or even danger for the communities of color. For example, one person told me how her elderly father, visiting from Colombia over the summer, always double-checked that he had his passport with him anytime he left the house in case the law enforcement was to stop him, even if he just went to get food for the cats at the corner store across the street. This is why anti-gentrification activism also often includes "cop watch", a sort of a neighborhood watch that ensures that in case of something happens, somebody is there to witness and even document the situation, and the police or ICE officers can be held accountable.

BAN also organizes large-scale demonstrations, marches and rallies against gentrification. At the time of my fieldwork, for example, they were planning the first Brooklyn-wide march against gentrification, racism and police violence, that ended up being endorsed by over ninety organizations and social movements in Brooklyn. Indeed, according to one organizer, the success of BAN has been in precisely that they have been able to expose things. An example of this was a demonstration in November 2015 against the 6th Annual Brooklyn Real Estate Summit that was supposed to be held at the Brooklyn Museum. The demonstration put a lot of pressure on the museum, which finally resulted to the museum promising they would not host the summits anymore in solidarity to their surrounding community.

Although BAN's organizing paves the way for people in Brooklyn to get involved and become empowered through participating in activism, individual and collective acts of resistance to gentrification beyond the network are vast in number and scope. As has been suggested above, art is one of the most influential channels to achieve this because it makes the resistance visible. However, there are many other ways to do that too.

One of the most fascinating manifestations of the need for people to participate in the discussion and share their stories about gentrification is a project called *Before It's Gone // Take It Back*. It is project by Equality for Flatbush and, by its own definition, it is the first-ever social media platform dedicated to celebrating and documenting life in Brooklyn and resisting gentrification. The site allows "every day New Yorkers to tell their stories about was happening to them right now, on the ground. This is the place to share pictures and videos of OUR BROOKLYN." (Henry 2016). According to the site, the project is

> a celebration of Brooklyn life as it is now with all its rich diversity and history. We're not interested in a Brooklyn that is homogeneous, without flavor, texture or color. Where only rich white people who can afford luxury condos can dwell. Gentrification destroys culture, displaces low-to-middle income people of all nationalities, takes away all that is uniquely beautiful about New York.

The site highlights intersectionality in its aim to "tell the truth about how gentrification uniquely impacts people of color, women, migrants, elders, young people, differently-abled people, families, people living with HIV/AIDS, lesbian, gay, bi, trans and Queer people, people living on governmental subsidies or in public housing". And ultimately it calls for people to unite, and offers resources to help them, for example, in legal or housing issues.

The public updates on the website include posts from local activists to promote their organizations, people's own accounts of their experiences of how their neighborhoods have changed, ads for cultural events including art shows and theatre, as well as calls for action. The website thus offers a shared space for remembering and creating meaning.

However, the language of gentrification resistance, especially on social media, can be

rather provocative. For example, “Gentrification is war, You don’t fight war with peace” is an intentionally confrontational phrase. Also, in their rhetoric of colonization and oppression, the resistance seems to align itself against the nation state in a very similar way that has been seen with indigenous peoples’ struggles for recognition. Strikingly similar is especially how they are claiming a right to stay put in their neighborhoods on the grounds of descent; their families have lived there for generations, or, as one organizer put it, they were there “before any white people wanted to live there”.

Borrowing from ethnographies of Aboriginal Australia and their perception of ancestry, Ingold (2000: 141) argues that through “long-term residence a person incorporates the essence of a locality into his or her own being, even to the extent of substantial identity”. In this light claiming a neighborhood your home has more legitimacy; it is a part of who you are, and thus an attack on one’s neighborhood is also personal and might ignite a passionate response. However, colonialism is a problematic and difficult concept to think with because it still remains a sore spot in the history of ‘the West’. Yet, considering that colonists in the popular conception establish their domination over indigenes “by the very fact of their occupation of the land” (Ingold 2000: 135), the analogy between gentrification and colonialism brings forth questions of domination in the urban political landscape.

6.2 Exclusion

As has been discussed earlier, gentrification in New York City is a manifestation of historically racist city planning policies that have dictated the lived realities of communities of color across the city. For example, “[o]ne of the most insidious results of redlining”, as Angotti and Morse (2017: 62) have pointed out, “was that it reinforced the notion that black people cause urban decline, thus feeding racial exclusion”, when in fact, “it was the banks, insurance companies, and federal and local governments that heavily contributed to decline as black residents struggled to maintain their homes and create businesses without access to capital and support from government.”

Thus, activists and organizers have to be very well informed on and engaged with local politics, which is a massive and constant effort. It takes resilience to keep going. However, the profound commitment to social justice, sense of solidarity to the community,

and the aim of being included in the decisions of urban development are powerful motivators.

During my research, justice was an often-occurring theme when talking to people about their perspectives on urban policies, their place in the city, and their relation to other groups. For most people the ideal of social justice was a very emotional concept, and especially the lack of it was seen as being deprived of something, treated unfairly, or put into a position of disadvantage. These feelings of being left out often stem from painful experiences of precarity; jobs are unstable, housing is increasingly unaffordable and displacement is a real threat, and public services are not easily or equally available to everyone. In the context of a prevalent view that "[t]he ideal of social justice is in the bedrock of any democratic society within which citizens can actively participate in a free, tolerant and inclusive political community" (Merrifield & Swyngedouw 1996: 1), being subjected to injustice is a profound experience.

However, Andy Merrifield and Erik Swyngedouw (1996: 7) have also pointed out that, "a universal model of justice that is mindful of exploitation, domination and oppression is arguably a utopian hope that no longer holds water in today's highly complex multicultural society". In other words, the concept of justice is very vulnerable to manipulation. This is demonstrated in Marxist reasoning where "the consumption of labour-power and the exploitation of the labourer is deemed just when looked upon from the standpoint of the work contract and laws of exchange" (ibid. 8). Furthermore, following this logic can be used to justify "deteriorating housing stock and homelessness if it is 'idealized' from the standpoint of the dynamics of capitalist landmarkets", as well as "the cultural oppression of ethnic groups when constructed as Other by the hegemonic occidental gaze" (ibid. 8). In other words, "the space of justice is highly contested terrain for conflicting social values" (ibid.8). In the context of a society as a whole, justice then boils down to power relations since "the ruling groups in any society make laws in their own interests and define as 'just' for their subjects simply what is in the interest of themselves" (ibid. 9). And here lies the well-grounded roots of people's mistrust of the government having their best interest in mind: what is defined as just may not be, and often is not, experienced as just by those whom the definition immediately effects.

Thus, in relation to urban development marginalized groups are othered based on their race and/or socioeconomic status, which has led them to be excluded from decision-making and knowledge production. In this regard, resistance is about challenging the prevailing narrative and striving to get out of the realm of exclusion. And sometimes, as Merrifield and Swyngedouw (1996: 12) note, "[t]he practices of exploitation by transnational corporate capital, domination and exclusion by state bureaucracies, and oppression by dominant social and cultural forces", which by the way are all aspects of gentrification, "has meant that those most disempowered in cities have had to resort to desperate forms of protest".

Perhaps the most widely known example of this has been the emergence of rap music and graffiti in the Bronx in the 1970s. Marshall Berman (1996) analyses rap music as 'a shout in the street', a phrase he has lent from James Joyce's Ulysees implying that for any divinity to exist it would be found in joyous moments of existence such as doing art. Born to a Jewish family and growing up in the South Bronx in the 1940s and 50s, Berman traces how the working-class neighborhood at the time was transformed in the 1960s and 70s due to austerity measures and planned shrinkage that left the neighborhood burning. From misery and despair, young people found certain idealism and rap was born from the ruins.

As we have seen, resistance to gentrification has also taken artistic forms. Because gentrification is very much about people's right to exist in the city, "acts of contestation and political action (in both its progressive and outright reactionary guises) revolve around the meaning and (re)appropriation of place and space" (Merrifield & Swyngedouw 1996: 13). What follows is that "[e]mpowerment and creative liberation, therefore, necessitate grappling with everyday life and the rituals inscribed in urban life" (ibid. 13). According to Merrifield and Swyngedouw also Lefebvre has underscored "how every emancipatory and empowering politics inevitably involves a spatial strategy: a struggle not just *in* but *for* a space, a reconquest of spaces expressive of lived difference, of desire, end of the body" (ibid. 13). In this light, art projects by community groups, like the ones described earlier, can be visual manifestations of political action and reclaiming space, and then sources of empowerment. Art can make visible the different life worlds that exist within the city.

However, it is somewhat astounding that as the excluded communities find creative ways to be seen, heard and acknowledged, and reappropriate space for themselves, these actions ultimately become the downfall of these communities. In other words, there is another dimension to the artistic shouts from the street and that is the commodification of culture. Even though they are on one hand a fundamental source of resistance and social transformation, on the other hand, the "trivial experiences, activities and fleeting moments are colonized by the commodity and dominant social forces and are thus shadowed with mystification" (Merrifield & Swyngedouw 1996: 13). Indeed, many gentrified neighborhoods have first become interesting in the eyes of outsiders because the vibrancy and ingenuity of the community has resulted in something new and exciting. And as we have seen, present-day street art is a widespread example of this. Graffiti, like rap, was born in the 'ghetto', and painted subway cars and daubed urban walls were frowned upon for decades. But now cities all over the world celebrate street art and it is used to signal the cool, up-and-coming neighborhoods.

And here we arrive again to the point made earlier about antagonisms between social groups in cities. Discussions around gentrification often highlight pervasive societal dichotomies between 'us' and 'them' (Mouffe 2013) – the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor, corporations and small businesses, long-term residents and newcomers, whites and people of color. As has been discussed earlier the different groups inhabit different worlds, which makes it difficult to see the other's point of view or imagine how the other might also face difficulties. However, in regard to gentrification and displacement there are certain privileges that the wealthier, and/or whiter, newcomers possess, most significant of which is the freedom of choice; they do not have to move to the disenfranchised neighborhoods, and moving somewhere else would not devastate their lives. Most low-income people of color are excluded from this choice. Moreover, being displaced means that these people become separated from their neighborhoods and communities, and are excluded once again.

Furthermore, as the planning policies have resulted in racially and ethnically segregated neighborhoods that have then been disregarded by the city, these communities often have quite little sympathy for the newcomers who sometimes explain their decisions of moving there through having themselves been displaced from their old neighborhoods.

In relation to this, Berman (1996: 164) has made a valuable point in stating that poverty in the late twentieth century USA, and to some extent even today, has meant isolation, "so that poor people of different ethnic groups are mostly ignorant of each other's existence". This has led the different groups to think that injustices affect 'just us', and thus other groups pose a threat to the community. This is why gentrification resistance emphasizes the importance of coming together.

It is also worthwhile to note, that New York has a long history of different ethnic groups shifting between its neighborhoods. This tradition is rooted in the waves of immigrants arriving to the city at different points in history. Italians, Irish, Chinese, Jewish, Puerto Rican, black and many more populations have made certain parts of the city their home. These have been the communities that the power elite of the city has historically considered dangerous and thus undesirable, and because of this, these groups have time after time been forced to move to other locations. However, this process of one disenfranchised group pushing another group out of its way should be understood separately from gentrification, because gentrification is about power that neither of these groups possesses. This unequal power dynamic requires all gentrification resistance to have awareness and knowledge of politics.

6.3 Dealing with politics

> To speak is above all to posses the power to speak. --- To take power is to win speak.
>
> Pierre Clastres (1989: 151)

Systemic racism that first led to the segregation in American cities still underlies the political, and consequently the built, structures of urban realities. The oppressing policies behind deindustrialization, redlining, urban renewal, benign neglect and planned shrinkage in New York were targeted at communities of color and the echoes of these practices can still be heard in some people's attitudes towards certain neighborhoods. Statistically, black and white people still live separately within the city (Angotti & Morse 2017). Moreover, the police treat the communities of color unequally to their white counterparts. For example, of all the people targeted by stop-and-frisk street interrogation – the city's crime-prevention strategy that allows police officers to obtain people for questioning based on a belief that they might be involved in a crime – well

over a half have consistently during the last two decades been black and roughly a third have been Latino (New York Civil Liberties Union 2020).

Accordingly, gentrification today has social and cultural impacts on disenfranchised urban communities as unequal power dynamics change the landscapes wherein they live. The version of the city that the city and real estate industry are creating has been excluding especially the poor and the communities of color. Thus, resistance to gentrification is a political struggle that requires people to be politically informed and have an understanding of urban planning and development. Understanding the policies that enable gentrification means that people have also had to get acquainted with the coded language of city planning and zoning (Angotti & Morse 2017). As we have seen, words like 'affordable', 'slum', and 'neighborhood development' are constructs that convey many layers of meaning. Moreover, bureaucracy creates a barrier for taking action, because complicated city planning procedures and technical documents require professionals to interpret them.

Local government in New York City consists of the Mayor, the Public Advocate, the Comptroller, the City Council of 51 members (one from each council district), the Borough Presidents, and 59 Community Boards. The City Council is the elected legislative body and responsible for, among many other things, land use decisions. Community boards are the local representative bodies whose members are selected and appointed by the Borough President. One organizer explained to me that what makes things complicated for people, is that the city council districts and the community districts are geographically different. Within one neighborhood people can belong to different council districts but be served by the same community board. For example, Williamsburg belongs to Brooklyn Community District 1 but is split between City Council Districts 33 and 34, whereas Bushwick belongs to Brooklyn Community District 4 but is split between City Council District 34 (same as part of Williamsburg) and 37. As responsibilities and decision-making are dispersed, it is more difficult for people to hold their representatives accountable.

Moreover, as "the neoliberalization of urban governance has consistently entailed efforts to extend commodification and its logic into more and more aspects of urban life, efforts typically justified as generating state efficiency, economic development, produc-

tive (and docile) urban subjects, and, not least, opportunities for private profit" (Brash 2018: 313), gentrification activists have had their hands full in organizing people.

City development is often validated as aiming for the common good; efficiency, better infrastructure, newer housing stock, better availability to services, decreasing crime rates by increasing surveillance, and so on. These improvements are often quantifiable and statistically justifiable, a measure of the legitimacy for official knowledge. The 'common', however, is an ever too rarely contested concept as it usually disguises the underlying motivations of the powerful.

According to Rancière (2004), the common good is always a process inherently linked to politics and democracy. Furthermore, the concept of common also implies a consensus, that there is a reachable outcome or a state of things with which everybody is equally satisfied. However, even the common is inevitably distorted by power dynamics, as there can never be a total unanimity on political issues, as different parties possess different dispositions and desires. The concept of cosmopolitics also rejects the idea that politics could achieve any overarching consensus or peace (Blok & Farías 2016). In reality the common good usually refers to a consensus forced into existence by the powerful regardless of opposition from the adversaries. Thus, the lack of transparency in public policy has lead to a struggle over representative democracy.

Yet, democracy is also an ambivalent construct. As Rancière (2006), for example, has pointed out democracy was originally a kind of disruption to the rule of the few. Thus, it should not be characterized merely by a constitutional state, elections and free press, per the general understanding, but also as disorder because in reality "democracy is not the idyll of the government of the people by the people, but the disorder of passions eager for satisfaction" (Rancière 2006: 6). On the other hand, for Rancière, democracy is also a process against hegemonies, not a society or a form of state: "There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as democratic government" because "[g]overnment is always exercised by the minority over the majority" (ibid. 52).

In addition to dealing with local governments, gentrification activists need to deal with real estate developers. To some extent this struggle is even more difficult because this is an actor that does not need to answer to the community the same way that local gov-

ernments do. However, due to community pressures and the city's land use policies the industry has come to adapt some measures to consider the impacts of their developments. Sometimes the developers go beyond their way to appear to commit to the needs of the community. They tend community board meetings, go dutifully through the city's extensive formal land use review process known as the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), conduct impact studies, and hold public hearings. According to some gentrification and housing activists, these processes of community input are not, however, in the favor of the community but the preferred battlegrounds of the elite. By going through the official procedures actions of the developers appear legitimate but the activists know that the community never gets what they are promised. Thus, they should not fight on the elite's terms or on their timeline, because that is not the strength of the community. Instead, one organizer implored people to "Fight in your terms – rally, march – and hold on to your lands."

Because of the multiplicity of the antagonists, resistance also has to take many forms. Also, for gentrification resistance, or any other social movement, to have any effect, it requires fighting on many fronts simultaneously. People must overcome their antagonisms over the 'other' and come together; protect the public spaces from privatization and culture from co-optation; demand truly affordable housing and an end to tax funds being redirected to the real estate industry through subsidies and abatements; and confront and challenge elected city and state officials (Angotti 2013).

Ortner (1995: 175) argues that resistance is useful as a category precisely because "it highlights the presence and play of power in the most forms of relationship and activity". Furthermore, she emphasizes that resistance in is essence always ambiguous and the acts of those engaging in resistance are always ambivalent. In other words, it is important to remember that even within resistance to an apparently mutual target, there can be differing, or even contesting, standpoints and aims. She also highlights that "resistance can be more than opposition, can be truly creative and transformative", if "the multiplicity of projects in which social beings are always engaged, and the multiplicity of ways in which those projects feed on as well as collide with one another" (ibid. 191) are recognized.

Thus, parallel to the idea of cosmopolitics as the politics of making worlds (Stengers

2005), politics in the city is in large part also about politics of knowledge production; whose voice is heard, whose is silenced. However, becoming knowledgeable about city planning policies, holding the local politicians accountable, organizing people under a unified battle, and refusing to submit to the forces of 'the market' makes reimagining alternatives possible.

Looking at the big picture, then, what resistance to gentrification really aims at is a larger political shift, some would even say a revolution, where all people, regardless of their socioeconomic status or the color of their skin, are treated equally and their needs prioritized over the needs of 'the market'. And where representational democracy would also work in the interests of even its most vulnerable subjects. This, however, would be a colossal and probably unattainable undertaking as it means re-evaluating the capitalist system upon which the United States is founded. Here also lies the biggest hindrance of resistance to gentrification; the majority of the majority are docile urban subjects who do not recognize the flaws in the system or cannot perceive an alternative, and thus see no reason to resist. Another problem with resistance is that it is often thought to be only about radical action, which scares the docile subjects away. Many do not seem to realize that resisting gentrification is fundamentally about "ordinary people in an ordinary town protesting ordinary threats to their environment and quality of life" (Berglund 2019a: 28).

7 Conclusions

Over half of humanity already lives in towns and cities, and the percentage is expected to grow to two thirds over the next five decades. Thus, anthropological research in urban settings in both western and non-western societies has become crucial in understanding the human condition. In other words, the city is a central arena where citizenship, identity and belonging, the democratic process, and human and civil rights are continually renegotiated (Prato & Pardo 2013). A close look into the politics behind gentrification reveals a reality created by the city and the real estate market where life in New York City, and other cities across the world, has become precarious, displacement is an eminent threat, feelings of security and insecurity have led to heightened racial stereotypes, the built environment is not sustainable, social justice is manipulated, public space and property are increasingly privatized, and cultural expression is co-opted and commodified (Low 2018). Thus, this thesis is a work of advocacy, or cultural critique, that examines how political power relations that shape physical realities in the city are challenged and renegotiated.

In this thesis I have discussed the layered landscape of gentrification in parts of Brooklyn, New York by analyzing how gentrification affects the lived realities particularly in disenfranchised communities, and how people have risen up in resistance. Based on my research data gathered from varying encounters in and with the city, I have suggested that in addition to more direct action, resistance is in large part about building and empowering the community, and realizing their power to fight back.

The analysis presented in this thesis has drawn upon three forms of resistance I identified over the course of my research. These are linked to each other by a mutual goal, yet differentiated by their approach, methods and scope. I have discussed the roles of artists in the fight against gentrification, described how art can be a source of empowerment for the community, and talked about direct anti-gentrification activism in Brooklyn and to some extend New York in general. Finally, I have discussed how these acts of resistance involve people in politics of the city.

I have argued that community art can make the community, or in other words, the different life-worlds that exist within the city, visible. Thus, art is a visual manifestation of

political action and reclaiming space, and in doing this, a source of empowerment (Latour 2005). It is also a form of collective memory and thus an instrument for radical reimagination. It is remembering as a form of soft revenge, that is, not about a sentimental retreat to the past but about not allowing things to be forgotten (Marrero-Guillamón 2016).

Gentrification happens slowly and stealthily until it does not. Once it becomes visible, it is usually too late to do anything to stop it. Newcomers start moving in, real estate deals are made behind closed doors, and construction begins. To be clear, this is not to say that gentrification is in any way a natural or inevitable part of a life of a city. It is intentional. It is set in motion in the offices of real estate developers and local government officials before it ever touches the target neighborhoods. It is presented as progress and improvement but in reality it is about capitalizing on land value (Angotti & Morse 2017). Ironically, however, gentrification is a double-ended sword that affects not only low-income communities but also the very character of the city; the very things that have made New York the city that it is, are being erased in the process. The result is a soulless shell of a once unique city that gradually resembles any other city anywhere in the world (Moss 2017; Zukin 2010). As the landscape becomes increasingly dominated by taller and narrower gleaming skyscrapers, one is left wondering what is the value of a city deplete of culture and social diversity.

Both assemblage thinking and anthropological theories on landscape allow analyzing the city as layered lived realities (Berglund 2019b; Berglund et al. 2019; Blok & Farías 2016; Ingold 2000). Separate realities, however, easily lead to antagonism toward 'the other' (Mouffe 2013). Thus, I have discussed the resulting politics in the city by using the concept of cosmopolitics that refers to the composition of common urban worlds that are riddled with conflicts and compromises (Stengers 2005). Moreover, ontological politics are used as a concept to analyze what is included and what is excluded from different enactments of the city, which entities and relationships are made present and which are made absent. Gentrification does not displace people, national and local government policies do. For the power elites gentrification is an abstract tool with which they can avert attention away from themselves. This is an exercise of power. To the disenfranchised communities gentrification is a process that threatens their homes,

communities, and the identities they have built from dwelling in their neighborhoods. Thus, gentrification brings up feelings of loss and frustration (Berglund 2019a).

By the time of finishing this thesis, the *¡Cultura con Azucar!* mural in Williamsburg has been torn down and in its place stands a brand new luxury tower over twenty stories high, blocking the view to the East River and casting a huge shadow over a large part of the surrounding neighborhood. This new landscape is very far removed from the lived experience of the community that created the mural. The voice that the mural gave them is yet again silenced. And the real estate developers' hidden agenda to co-opt culture to draw favorable attention to them has once again been proven successful.

I have outlined how systemic racism inherent in certain historical city planning practices has worked to create the realities in which many communities of color still (must) live. Moreover, because of the unequal power relations within the city politics, social movements argue that gentrification is analogous to colonialism as real estate developers keep 'discovering' and conquering 'new' neighborhoods. In these usually low-income communities gentrification is a situation forced upon people where they have effectively two options: fight it or leave. It is not an isolated event but a manifestation of neoliberal capitalism, which makes fighting it very difficult. So, many are forced to move away. But some stay put and fight. This resistance highlights the questions of right to the city and how people strive to have a say over the course of their lives even when facing forces far greater than them (Harvey 2009; Mayer 2009). In other words, resistance to gentrification as oppression is about being seen and heard, and thus demanding more inclusive urban policies and practices, and a better quality of life (see Robbins 2013).

Social media has had a massive effect in the ways that social movements are able to organizing, and its reach is has proved unprecedented (Juris 2012). Indeed, it has had an influential meaning also in the formation of this thesis; I would have probably never reached the people I encountered or found out about the events I participated in during my research without social media. However, despite it being a helpful tool, organizing and activism online is not enough to make a change. True impact, as many members in social movements emphasize, takes resilience to keep fighting the same things over and over again until something, hopefully, shifts.

Finally, at the time of writing this, it has been three weeks since massive uprisings erupted across the United States after George Floyd, an unarmed black man was killed by a police officer in Minneapolis. However, the following unrest was about much more than George Floyd. The demonstrations were initiated by the Black Lives Matter movement and quickly grew into a larger social critique over systemic racism and police brutality. As weeks have gone by the demonstrators have started to demand defunding the police and reallocating their budgets into communities and proactive crime prevention measures.

In some cities, people have barricaded city blocks in order to demonstrate what a community could be like without the police. For example, in Seattle hundreds of protestors took over a couple of city blocks and a park, and declared it Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone, or CHAZ, a police-free community. People also took over the Seattle Police Department East Precinct, tagged it with graffiti and replaced the word police with people on the sign outside the building. They put up tents that distributed medical supplies, local restaurants donated food, and organizers handed out snacks and water bottles. Commenting on this president Trump tweeted that "Domestic terrorists have taken over Seattle", and later demanded the Mayor of Seattle and the Governor of Washington to "Take back your city NOW." According to an AFP news report on June 12, 2020, the demonstrators were wondering what the president meant by this. One demonstrator reportedly told the AFP:

> This is our city. I was born and raised in this damn city. Let's give it to the people, the people who live in Seattle and have been thriving here.

Indeed, during the current civil unrest the notion of taking back the city has once again been employed in political rhetoric. This time, however, it has been the president who has repeatedly, via Twitter, urged city and state government officials to enforce "LAW & ORDER!" and to take their cities back from what he has called "thugs", "ugly anarchists" and "domestic terrorists", and threatened that if they wound not, he would send the National Guard to their streets. However, the difference in the current situation is that the local government officials have stood up to the president who has seemingly turned against his own citizens, and publicly defended the rights of the people living in their cities. Nonetheless, this is yet another depiction of how people with a position of

political and/or economic power think of the city only as property of the state, or a money-making machine, not people's lived reality.

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